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DOCTORAL THESIS

BRINGING LESBIAN- AND GAY-FRIENDLINESS INTO THE CORPORATE  
WORLD: THE DIFFUSION OF CONTROVERSIAL DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT PRACTICES  
THROUGH THE LENS OF INSTITUTIONAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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## Table of contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
Table of contents.....	4
Introduction.....	5
1. Literature review .....	10
1.1 What do we mean by diversity in organizations? .....	11
1.2 From equal employment to diversity management.....	15
1.3 The diffusion of DM .....	21
1.4 Sexual orientation and gender diversity in organizations .....	23
1.5 The Italian context .....	32
2. Theoretical framework.....	40
2.1 The institutional analysis of organizations .....	41
2.2 Institutional change and institutional entrepreneurs .....	49
2.3 Research gaps and objectives of the present study .....	56
3. Research design and methodology .....	58
4.1 Design and method .....	58
4.2 Data analysis .....	68
4. Findings .....	73
4.1 The top-down process of adoption of LG-friendly practices.....	73
4.2 The bottom-up process of adoption of LG-friendly practices .....	79
4.3 Parks as institutional entrepreneur .....	83
4.4 Trade union confederations' LGBT-rights departments as institutional entrepreneurs .....	88
4.5 Relations between Parks and trade unions.....	93
5. Discussion.....	97
5.1 Two types of institutional entrepreneurs .....	97
5.2 Implications for practitioners.....	102
6. Conclusion .....	105
6.1 Final remarks .....	106
6.2 Limitations and future research .....	110
References.....	113

## **Introduction**

### **Overview of the phenomenon**

The adoption of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender<sup>1</sup> (LGBT)-friendly policies by organizations in Italy is a very recent, on-going phenomenon and represents a privileged opportunity for the study of organizational institutional change in institutionally complex environments. First examples of the implementation of practices explicitly addressing heterosexism by Italian organizations date back just to the late 2000s and, despite some pressure from the European Union, the Italian institutional context apparently did not provide those organizations with the institutional opportunity to embark in such a change.

Internationally, the inclusion of a diverse workforce and related diversity management practices have increasingly received attention from both management and organizational research (see Shore et al., 2009) and business consultancies, which have started identifying diversity management as a saleable expertise to organizations, together with the promise of gaining competitive advantage through a higher degree of inclusion (Hunt, Layton, & Prince, 2015; Smith & Yoshino, 2013). In recent years this promise increasingly includes the inclusion of LGBT employees (e.g. Hewlett & Yoshino, 2016).

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<sup>1</sup> The management practices discussed in this article almost exclusively address lesbian and gay issues. The widespread usage of the term LGBT (or GLBT) for naming the target group of these practices in the Italian business context as well as internationally lumps together minority statuses on terms of employees' 'sexual orientation' and 'gender identity', although both phenomena are not directly linked, and transgender issues are mostly totally ignored. I make use of the term LGBT as the most adopted in the literature I quote, as well as by the participants to this study. I am nevertheless conscious of the limitations this approach may entail (see Köllen, 2016b, for this debate).

### **How previous literature has dealt with the topic**

Since diverse sexual orientation in the workplace may involve stereotyping, stigma and organizational demography, organizational and management research on sexual orientation diversity and diversity management primarily focuses on analysing the intensity and shape of heterosexism and discrimination in the workplace, antecedents and consequences of lesbian and gay employees' way of dealing with their sexual orientation at work (e.g. Lloren & Parini, 2017; Ozturk & Rumens, 2014), direct consequences of discrimination (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001), and the impact of the presence or absence of certain diversity management initiatives on homosexual employees' wellbeing or working behaviour (e.g. Bell, Özbilgin, Beauregard, & Sürgevil, 2011; Huffman, Watrous-Rodriguez, & King, 2008) or on the organizations' performance, reputation or standing (see Anteby & Anderson, 2014; Badgett, Durso, Kastanis, & Mallory, 2013; McFadden, 2015; Ozeren, 2014).

Another research stream focuses on the way sexual orientation diversity management became operative in management practice, and on its international diffusion. The first who have implemented specific management practices regarding gay and lesbian employees were US companies in the early 1980s. This phenomenon has been studied by a first wave of institutional scholars who combine institutional and social movement theory to document the antecedents and mechanisms of the process of adoption of such practices. Creed and Scully (2000) and Creed, Scully, and Austin (2002), describe the strategies adopted by LGBT activists both inside and outside the organization to create narratives and shared identities with straight colleagues to foster the adoption of such practices. Those strategies relied on the exploitation and recombination of contradicting institutional logics (Friedland & Alford, 1991; Thornton & Ocasio, 2008; Thornton, Ocasio, & Lounsbury, 2012) and prevailing cultural models. Similarly, (Raeburn, 2004) merges institutional and social movement theories tracing the process that led to the adoption of inclusive practices in the American corporation field. She stresses how the change process relied on the interaction effect between lesbian and gay activists' internal pressures and the broader socio-political context, considering institutional factors, such as the legal framework, the political environment and the media coverage of homosexuality-related issues. The

wide spreading of lesbian- and gay-friendly practices across American companies in the 1990s led scholars to consider the impact of institutional factors over such diffusion process. In particular, Briscoe and Safford (2008), Chuang, Church, and Ophir (2011) and (Everly & Schwarz, 2014) look at the impact of variables like the adoption of the LGBT-supportive practices by other companies, the presence of anti-discrimination laws on the basis of sexual orientation and, in the case of Chuang, Church and Ophir (2011), the overall tenure of press coverage of the same-sex partner benefits issue to explain the decision to implement lesbian and gay-friendly practices.

### **Knowledge gap and expected contribution**

At present, the studies targeting the diffusion of LGBT-friendly practices at the organizational level and the associated institutional change process refer exclusively to the American context, while the European context remains neglected. Theodorakopoulos and Budhwar (2015) call to ‘shed more light on how institutional mechanisms play out to influence the adoption of LGBT-friendly policies by organizations in different contexts’ (p. 182), invites indeed to a more nuanced understanding of the relation between the institutional context in which the practices are adopted and the characteristics and the strategies of the actors that partake in such an accomplishment. In this context, the present work aims to contribute to the institutional discourse on LG(BT)-friendly practices by adding a European perspective to it. Indeed, literature on comparative HRM has shown that in Europe, companies do not have the same amount of managerial autonomy as their U.S./American colleagues to design organizational practices. Specifically, the European HRM model is considered to (i) have a strong stakeholder orientation, whereas the American HRM model is considered to have a strong shareholder orientation; (ii) to attribute greater importance than the American model to consultation and collective representation; and (iii) to be more influenced by the State and by labour regulation than the American model (Mayrhofer, Sparrow, & Brewster, 2012). Accordingly, Brewster (2004) suggested that in Europe ‘business strategy, HR strategy, and HR practice (should be seen as) located within an environment of national culture, national legislation,

state involvement, and trade union representation; these factors are seen as part of HRM and not merely as antecedents to it.’ (p. 371).

In order to explain why and how a group of companies in Italy decided to implement LG(BT)-friendly practices, in the first phase of my research I drew on an explorative multiple case study based on a heterogeneous sample of 14 organizations to detect two processes of adoption such practices in Italy: a bottom-up process characterized by a business case logic and led by apical actors in the organization, and a bottom-up process, spurred by trade unions and hinging on an ethical logic. Then, as the role played by external actors, namely an employers’ association and two unions’ LGBT-rights departments, emerged as crucial in these processes, I set up a second round of interviews drawing on the notion of institutional entrepreneurship (Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum, 2009; Fligstein, 1997; Hardy & Maguire, 2008), that is the activity of actors with sufficient resources who see an opportunity in new institutional arrangements (DiMaggio, 1988). This concept reveals useful to show how unions are a crucial actor in this process, in which they are in some way antagonistic and in some way complementary to the employers’ association. As both actors represent different parties in industrial relations, namely employees and employers, their interplay and their differing needs of securing their own legitimacy is of crucial importance for understanding the diffusion processes and their role within it. Referring to the main analytical dimensions of institutional entrepreneurship literature (Battilana et al. 2009; Hardy and Maguire 2008) I trace the relations between the two processes and the respective institutional entrepreneurs.

### **Structure of the thesis**

The following part of my thesis is structured as follows. In the next chapter, I first delineate the origin and diffusion of diversity management, from the US to Europe, and the logics which underpin it. Then I overview the studies which have dealt with the issue of diversity of sexual orientation and gender identity in the workplace, both at the individual and organizational level, and I describe the most relevant features of the Italian context in relation to this topic. In the third chapter,



I define the theoretical framework of my research, providing a brief review of neo-institutionalism with a focus on institutional change in organizations and the paradox of ‘embedded agency’; the last part of this chapter is dedicated to institutional entrepreneurship. In the fourth chapter, I describe and try to justify my methodological approach. In the fifth chapter, I outline the Italian scenario with respect to the adoption of LGBT-supportive practices in organizations and then I analyse the characteristics of the institutional entrepreneurs that partake in such processes, as well as the relations occurring between them. In the sixth chapter, I discuss the peculiarity of the Italian case and its potential usefulness in understanding the adoption of institutionally controversial practices in the European context, as well as its theoretical contribution to the institutional entrepreneurship debate. In the seventh and last chapter, I discuss some limitations of my research and possible avenues for future research.

## **1. Literature review**

Workplace diversity is still a debated in that revolves around the conceptualization of diversity (and therefore of identity). Thus, the first section of the chapter is dedicated to the literature that have dealt with the theoretical conceptualization of diversity in organization.

Diversity management (DM) developed in North American organizations in the 1980s to established itself as an independent sub-field of management studies in the following years. Especially among practitioners, DM revolves around the so called ‘business case for diversity’, that is the assumption that diversity must be intended as a valuable resource for the organization in business terms. Yet, the origins of workplace diversity do not dwell in the corporation field, but in a series of federal laws addressing equal employment opportunities (EEO) and affirmative actions (AA) in the workplace. The second section of the chapter describes the process of ‘managerialization’ of EEO/AA laws (Edelman, Fuller, & Mara-Drita, 2001) and the differences occurring between the morally-grounded approach underpinning EEO and AA laws and the business case approach at the base of diversity management. Furthermore, it provides a brief overview of the arguments recently developed by critical diversity management studies.

DM has rapidly spread across American corporations in the 1990s and, from early 2000s, also in Europe, but with different dynamics. Thus, in the third section I focus on the trajectories of diffusion of DM in Europe, highlighting the role played by the European Union in shaping this process.

Sexual orientation and gender identity are probably the most neglected dimension of diversity (Köllen, 2016a); however, in recent years a growing body of research has focused on LGBT issues, giving particular attention to the antecedents and consequences of discrimination in the workplace as well as to the potential benefits deriving from a more inclusive work environment. The fourth section of the chapter give a short overview of those studies that deal with sexual orientation and gender identity in organization.

In Italy, LGBT studies are not as developed as in other Western countries, especially with respect to the organizational dimension. Nevertheless, in the final section I try to delineate the landscape where this research has taken place by means of the few publications that describe homosexual and transgender condition in Italy and its organizations.

### **1.1 What do we mean by diversity in organizations?**

In the last decades, diversity discourse has attracted a lot of attention. Globalization and migration flows have entailed demographical changes that have necessarily impacted the labour force composition, and then relational dynamics within and across organizations. Notwithstanding the increasing amount of studies focusing on different dimensions of diversity like gender, sexuality, ethnicity, age, class, disability and many other identity categories and their management in organizations, it is still complex and partially possible to define what diversity is, in general and within the organization. Different organizations in different cultural contexts still make very different interpretations of diversity and its meaning, and thus develop different management strategies to deal with it accordingly (cf. Bendl, Bleijenbergh, Henttonen, & Mills, 2015). Moreover, diversity management (DM) can present multiple and controversial facets, since the very practices aiming at the inclusion of certain categories may have the potential to exclude them by reinforcing stereotyping and extant power relations.

Diversity has also been defined as ‘the collective amount of differences among members within a social unit’ (Harrison and Sin 2006; cit. in Gotsis & Kortezi, 2015: 1). This (as well as the other) definition is underpinned by notions of difference and intersectionality that, in turn, bring forth questions about which categories define individual and group identity, how these categories interrelates with each other and how underlying assumptions may influence the way diversity management is intended and enacted (cf. Hearn & Louvrier, 2015). For instance, the adoption of an essentialist perspective makes differences and identities to be conceived as stable, innate and coherent

as they ‘stem from biology, from socialization into a group, or from more fixed structural categorization and positioning’ (p. 64). On the contrary, a constructionist approach sees differences as constructed through the interaction of the individual and the social environment, and then strictly influenced by power relationships.

If one follows essentialist assumptions, differences exist prior to the organization, and are at base unrelated to it. From a constructionist perspective, differences are (also) constructed in the organization, for instance, in the organizing of the work. These starting points give quite different bases for DM. Where an essentialist approach to DM manages fixed, stable, and pre-existing differences, a constructionist approach acknowledges that DM is also a site where differences are produced. (Hearn & Louvrier, 2015, p. 65)

Thus, different assumptions about difference and identity lead to different conceptualizations of diversity.

In their review, Qin, Muenjohn and Chhetri (2014) identify three common threads in the various conceptualizations of diversity in organizations present in the literature, namely,

- The attributes that differentiate people from each other;
- The level of construct (e.g. individual or group/social unit) in which diversity situates;
- The way personal attributes are configured into diversity.

They found that attributes that have received most attention were six: race, age, gender, education, functional background, and tenure and how these attributes have been further classified according to two dimensions: visibility (social diversity) and job-relatedness (information diversity). The former reflects the social aspects of diversity (i.e. the extent to which they are easily observed by group members), while the latter indicates ‘the extent to which diversity attributes directly shape perspectives and skills related to tasks’ (Pelled, 1996; cit. in Hearn & Louvrier, 2015, p. 143). With respect to second and third thread, they notice how emerging empirical evidence suggesting that the effects of perceived diversity, which refers to subjective interpretations of diversity attributes, are stronger than the effects of objective diversity, and then call for conceptualizations of diversity as a

social construct. To similar conclusions comes Konrad (2003), according to whom ‘rather than attempting to include all individual differences within the workplace diversity domain, the workplace diversity literature should focus on the study of identity groups in organizations. Identity groups are the collectivities people use to categorize themselves and others’ (p. 7). Indeed, even though several diversity scholars assume that surface-level diversity (e.g. race) ‘is indicative of deeper-level differences, such as cognitive processes/schemas, differential knowledge base, different sets of experiences, and different views of the world’ (Shore et al., 2009: p. 118), in order to justify one of the tenants of the so-called ‘business case for diversity’ (i.e. that more heterogeneous groups yield better performances than homogeneous one), ‘research has concluded that demographic characteristics do not consistently relate in a meaningful way with knowledge, skills, attitudes, or values’ (p. 126). These results seem in line with the definitions of Gorman (2000), who argues that diversity may be conceived of as the varied perspectives and approaches members of different identity groups bring to the workplace, and DiTomaso and colleagues (2007), who conceive diversity as a variety of socio-cultural and demographic characteristics that are salient and symbolically meaningful in the relationships among group members.

The globalizing economy and the increase in multinational corporations have brought to an increased focus on the geographical and cultural context in which organizational diversity takes place (cf. Gotsis & Kortezi, 2015; Michalle, 2014; Syed & Özbilgin, 2009). First considerations concern the fact that the workforce composition may vary according to the level of internalization of the organizations. Michalle (2014) brings the example of a Germany company setting up policies and training programs for improving sensibility and providing employment opportunities to members of minority groups and recent immigrants, to outline the notion of ‘intranational diversity management’, that is the management of ‘citizens or immigrants within a single national organizational context’ (p. 236). On the other end, she talks of ‘cross-national’ diversity management, to refer to the management of a diverse workforce across different countries, that is the establishment of diversity policies and trainings applicable in the company’s headquarters and in its subsidiaries in those countries. On their

part, Syed and Özbilgin (2009) criticize single-level conceptualizations of diversity management for inadequately accounting for power disparities and disadvantage within social and employment contexts. More specifically, they highlight how the non-consideration of socio-cultural variables related to different geographical context may lead to local non-compatibility and cultural imperialism, which are traditionally associated with the Anglo-Western notion of diversity management in non-Western contexts. A classic example of these shortcoming relates to gender discrimination in the workplace. While Western countries have long since recognized gender as a source of discrimination and many national and organizational policies have been designed to address the issue (even though gender parity is yet to come), other national contexts and their cultural reality (e.g. with respect to religion and family models) basically withholds women from the workplace or from certain occupations, and result therefore incompatible with the traditional Western conception of gender equality. In order to overcome these shortcomings and understand the unique discourses and enactments of diversity management within each society, the authors propose a relational framework for diversity management which considers the interactions occurring between macro-national (e.g. legislative framework of equal opportunity and diversity; socio-political policies; labour market; economy; demography; history), meso-organizational (e.g. organisational approaches towards diversity; benchmarking and evaluation). and micro-individual variables (e.g. individual agency, perspectives and experiences; multiple identities).

Despite the abovementioned and other results (informed among others by post-structuralism, post-colonial studies, queer theory or radical feminism) have ‘reframed differences as relational, socially constructed, constitutive of one’s subjective identity, signifying relations of power, multiple, contradictory, contextual and fluid’ (Holvino & Kamp, 2009: 398; see also Bendl, Fleischmann, & Walenta, 2008) an essentialized and inherently a-historical approach still dominate current diversity management theory and practice (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2015; Holvino & Kamp, 2009). Indeed, the majority of companies and practitioners still rely upon the schematization of (Loden & Rosener, 1991) in their internal and external communication about their diversity strategies, or its further

developments, among which the one by Gardenswartz and Rowe (2003) is probably the best-known (Köllen, 2016b). Their model defines diversity across four layers: personality, internal dimensions, external dimensions and organizational dimensions; those layers are in turn subdivided in other dimensions. Personality consists in the unique way everyone interacts with others and includes his values, beliefs and personal inclinations. Internal dimensions encompass attributes over which the individual has no control, age, ethnicity and race, gender, sexual orientation and physical ability. These categories are currently the most commonly referred to in diversity management programs. The third level concerns external dimensions, that is aspects of life over which individuals have some sort of control, they can vary over time and impact job-related choices; they include marital and parental status, geographical location, income, personal habits, recreational habits, religion and spirituality, educational background, work experience and appearance. The last layer pertains organizational dimensions, which relates to cultural aspects of the work environment, such as the management status, the functional level/classification, the work content/field, the division/department/unit/group of belonging, seniority, the work location and union affiliation.

## **1.2 From equal employment to diversity management**

The birth of workplace diversity scholarship, also referred as *diversity management*, as a management discipline is made to coincide with the release of the report *Workforce 2000: Work and Workers in the 21st Century* (W. P. Johnston & Paker, 1987) by the Hudson Institute. The report highlighted a series of shifts in the demographics of the American workforce that would have negatively affected the performance of the whole economy if not managed properly. The authors observed how, in the years between 1987 and 2000, the workforce ‘will grow slowly, becoming older, more female, and more disadvantaged. Only 15 percent of the new entrants to the labour force over the next 13 years will be native white males, compared to 47 percent in that category today’ (p. xiii). Then, they call for organizational and managerial adjustments able to meet the needs of those

disadvantaged groups, especially women and minorities such as Black and Hispanics, in a time of increased global competition. Flexible hours, sick leave for taking care of children, part-time work and pregnancy leaves for mothers and fathers were suggested practices to make organizations more suitable for women. Concerning ethnic minorities, the authors pointed out how those groups were ‘not only less likely to have had satisfactory schooling and on-the-job training [but] they may have language, attitude, and cultural problems that prevent them from taking advantage of the jobs that will exist’ (p. xiv), and thus call for investments in education and training, as well as recruitment policies that could create equal employment opportunities for disadvantaged groups. These arguments formed the basis for the forthcoming *business case* for diversity – according to which a more diverse workforce is profitable to the organization – that spread in the organizational vocabulary since late 1980s.

However, the way American organizations previously approached diversity in the 1970s and 1980s was different, both in rhetoric and practice, as it hinged on a *social justice* logic (Gatrell & Swan, 2008). This approach can be derived from the political pressure of the American civil rights movement, that led in the early 1960s to the approval and enforcement of a series of laws which on the one hand made employment discrimination illegal and, on the other, forced companies to take positive steps to ensure equal opportunities by hiring candidates from minority groups (positive discrimination): the so called equal employment opportunity (EEO) and affirmative action (AA) legislations (Kelly & Dobbin, 1998). The fight of Afro-Americans for political recognition and better social and economic conditions made the theme of diversity in organizations in this phase more political than managerial, and the emphasis should be put on the notion of equality. Indeed, as the focus is placed on providing remedy for past injustice and inequities suffered by certain minority groups, the law forces organizations to take countermeasures (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2015).

In the 1980s, the enforcement of EEO/AA legislation was curtailed by Reagan administration. In conformity with Reagan’s deregulation policy, EEO/AA approach was criticised because against individual merit and ineffective in creating inclusive workplaces (Gatrell & Swan, 2008). In fact,



positive discrimination would have enhanced resistance from the majority group and managers, who would have felt compelled to manage activities and goals not directly related to business logics. More in general, EEO and AA initiatives seemed ‘short-sighted’ as simply concerned with the employment of minorities in the organization and unable to consider what would have happened once inside it (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2015), as well as incapable of allowing individuals to express and value their own differences; at the opposite, EEO/AA policies would have forced them to homologate to the dominant cultural paradigm in order to legitimize their membership in the organization (Thomas, 1990).

Those arguments, together with those associated to the demographic changes of the American workforces in the growingly global scenario depicted in *Workforce 2000*, paved the way for a new approach to diversity. The way organizations dealt with a diverse workforce should not have been bound by legal requirements but be voluntary and thus more flexible; not concerned with fixing past social injustices but future-oriented and politically neutral; more focused on the individual and legitimized by enhanced business performances (i.e. the business case) (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2015; Kelly & Dobbin, 1998; Pringle & Strachan, 2016). The difference between this new approach, referred as diversity management (DM), and the previous one, are synthetized in the table below.

*Table 1.1 Two approaches to diversity (Source: Gotsis & Kortezi, 2015).*

Initiative-practices	Justification	Source	Nature-content	Level of implementation
EEO e AA	Moral arguments	Legally imposed	Focus on discrimination & justice	Focus on the group-level
DM	Business arguments (business case)	Voluntary – market driven	Focus on differences as an asset	Focus on the individual level

The business case for diversity hinges on three basic arguments. First, as indicated in *Workforce 2000*, diversity of the labour force has increased as well as competition for the recruitment of the best talents on the job market (the so-called ‘war for talent’): considering that, all qualified candidates should be considered for employment, regardless of their differences, and of the group or

category they belong to. Second, a more diverse society and a globalized marketplace mean a more diverse customer base, and businesses that mirror it by employing a diverse workforce will be better able to understand and communicate with it in terms that reflects its concerns. Third, more heterogeneous groups can outperform homogeneous groups on problem-solving and creativity tasks because diverse groups can rely on a wider set of resources, also in terms of information, experience, perspectives, and cognitive styles (cf. Day & Greene, 2008; Konrad, 2003; Shore et al., 2009).

In this new fashion, diversity management spread rapidly across American corporations. By 1997, 75% of Fortune 500 companies had some sort of diversity program (Konrad, 2003).

Interestingly, Kelly and Dobbin (1998) have noticed how, despite the different assumptions underpinning the DM approach, the practices adopted by organizations remained mostly the same preached by EEA and AA. Strategies like ‘diversity commitment into mission statements, diversity action plans, accountability for meeting diversity goals, employee involvement, career development and planning, diversity education and training, and long-term initiatives directed at culture change’, were like ‘old wine in new wineskins’ (Kelly and Dobbin, 1998: 978). Kelly and Dobbin (1998) argue that the ambiguity about the terms of compliance of EEO and AA induced employers to hire antidiscrimination specialists to design EEO/AA programs which eventually became an institutionalised professional group; after Reagan’s deregulation wave, this constituency refashioned their old practices through the rhetoric of DM based on the business case. Not only this change of rhetoric worked well to ensure professional survival to diversity specialists, but it also contributed a lot to the diffusion of diversity management: indeed, according to a study from the Williams Institute (Mallory & Sears, 2011), almost all (92%) of the top 50 Fortune 500 companies and the top 50 federal government contractors state that, in general, diversity policies and generous benefit packages are good for their business. As Konrad (2003) notes:

By appealing to the interests of the most powerful organizational stakeholders, namely, business owners and managers, those academics and consultants making the business

case for diversity were able to motivate businesses to find ways to include and improve their treatment of groups that historically had been excluded from the best organizational positions. (p. 5)

The success of diversity rhetoric in US management through the reframing of ideas inherent in civil rights laws was defined as *managerialization of law* by Edelman, Fuller, and Mara-Drita (2001), that is ‘the process by which conceptions of law may become progressively infused with managerial values as legal ideas move into managerial and organizational arenas’ (p. 1592). As the authors point out, ‘the managerial conception of diversity adds a variety of nonlegal dimensions of diversity (e.g., personality traits) to the legally protected categories like race and sex, and it disassociates diversity from civil rights law’ (p. 1591).

If, on the one hand, the business case has decisively contributed to the spread of inclusive practices across American corporations as well as overseas (E. Boxenbaum & Battilana, 2005; Eva Boxenbaum, 2006; Tatli, Vassilopoulou, Ariss, & Özbilgin, 2012), on the other hand different scholars have highlighted a series of criticalities related to this approach, giving birth to a coherent body of critical studies (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2015). In the first place, some critics noticed that the very practical argument underpinning the business case for diversity, that is the positive association between group heterogeneity and its performance, lacks empirical evidence to be supported. Research findings in this respect are indeed scarce and fragmented, often yielding conflicting results (cf. Gotsis & Kortezi, 2015; Kochan et al., 2003; Shore et al., 2009). For example, in their literature review Joshi and Roh (2009) found a fairly equal amount of studies reporting positive or negative effects for race/ethnicity diversity on different performance-related variable. Moreover, they found that null findings outnumbered both positive and negative effects put together, and called for a more contextual understanding of work team diversity effects. More in general, the business case seems more a rhetorical, discursive tool than an established rationale for the maintenance of a diverse workforce (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2015).

A second, major critical point for a DM based on the business case is that its utilitarian, instrumental arguments neglect the moral based grounding that make of DM also a social justice issue (Noon, 2007). The consequences of this simplification are not trivial since, by depoliticizing discrimination issues in the workplace that may be related to structural historical disparities and/or not including in the diversity discourse whatever vision that may challenge present organizational goals and then the status quo, the business case approach protects dominant ideologies and extant power relations (cf. Gotsis & Kortezi, 2015; Noon, 2007). In other words, ‘DM discourse reflects the existing power relations between management and employees within a corporation’ (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2015: 17), becoming the most appealing way to deal with workplace diversity for shareholders and top managers.

Moreover, a conception of diversity that goes over legally protected categories or historically subjugated minorities (e.g. women and Blacks in the U.S.) and more focused on individual dimensions of diversity, such as personality traits (Edelman et al., 2001), may entail issues of stereotyping, prejudice, and institutional and interpersonal discrimination. This conception is underpinned by a trait model logic (Konrad, 2003) according to which ‘diverse groups are thought to function differently because their members vary substantially in personality, values, knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviour’ (p. 6). As Konrad (2003) argues, this logic ‘neglects the impact of power/dominance relations between groups because the focus is on individuals rather than the contextual factors affecting them’ and threatens to make the concept of workplace diversity meaningless, since ‘if individual differences are all that is necessary to make a workplace diverse, then all groups are diverse by definition’ (p.7).

Finally, but perhaps even more warningly, the lack of a universal principle for equality and the commodification of diversity as an asset for the organization, submit non-discrimination to organizational profit. The acceptance of an economic, cost-benefit analysis as the underlying rationale of DM implicitly leaves room to discrimination for cases in which equality is not beneficial for business pursuits (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2015; Noon, 2007). For example, discrimination may be tolerable

whenever homogeneous groups outperform heterogeneous ones, or, relying on the ‘mirroring’ argument, certain categories or groups that may represent a significant portion of the customer base are positively discriminated.

As Gatrell and Swan (2008) notice, ‘diversity is increasingly used as a marketing device, or even as an organizational brand’, often by means of slogan celebrating diversity as a component of organizational identity and images filled with ‘happy colourful faces’ (p. 58). Yet, the authors warn, in this way DM becomes the mere inclusion of people who *look* different, making them the embodiment of difference so that the institutional ‘whiteness’ of such organizations is concealed, ‘because the embedded practices, values and cultures of the dominant white group are not counteracted’ (Gatrell & Swan, 2008, p. 58).

### **1.3 The diffusion of DM**

If the managerialization of EEO/AA laws and the business case for diversity made DM already well spread throughout American corporations already in the 1990s (cf. Kelly & Dobbin, 1998), European countries lag a decade behind in terms of diffusion and extent of diversity policies and practice (Holvino & Kamp, 2009).

The European context shares some of the structural characteristics that have facilitated the birth and diffusion of DM in the U.S.: demographical changes such as the aging working population and the increasing presence of women and immigrants in the labour market, the growth of the service sector, globalization and the explosion of new markets, along with other structural changes in organizations. In addition, the accumulated experience of American corporations has made the transmission and translation of DM practices easier, both through the adoption by European branches and subsidiaries and managers and consultants who worked in the U.S. (cf. Boxenbaum, 2006; Boxenbaum & Battilana, 2005; Holvino & Kamp, 2009; Klarsfeld, 2009; Klarsfeld, Ng, & Tatli, 2012; Murgia & Poggio, 2014; Süß & Kleiner, 2007).

First European organization to adopt DM practices were English and Dutch in late 1990s: United Kingdom and Netherlands were former colonial powers whose population is characterized by the presence of numerous ethnic minorities (Holvino & Kamp, 2009; Wrench, 2007). In the first 2000s diffusion extended to Scandinavian countries where the prospect of upcoming heavy immigration flows and becoming multicultural societies made DM to be conceived of as a means to integrate ethnic minorities in the labour market (Holvino & Kamp, 2009; Wrench, 2007). Subsequently other European Western countries saw the emergence of DM, with different approaches and trajectories (cf. Zapata-Barrero, 2010) as in the case of Spain (Zapata-Barrero, 2010, 2013), Germany (Süß & Kleiner, 2007), France (Klarsfeld, 2009) and, later, also Italy (Murgia & Poggio, 2014).

European community recommendations, financial support and, most importantly, directives, have spurred the diffusion of DM in Europe and somehow defined the dimensions of diversity which employers cannot discriminate against. The first law posing attention on issues of workplace equality has been the Council Directive 75/117/EEC on discrimination on grounds of sex with regard to all aspects and conditions of remuneration. Twenty-five years later, the Council of Europe implemented the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin with the Directive n. 43/2000/EC, and established a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation with the Directive n. 78/2000/EC. The latter not only extends the principle of equal treatment to the realm of employment and occupation, but also identifies new dimensions of diversity on which public and private employers cannot discriminate, that are sexual orientation, age, disability, race/ethnic origin, and religion/belief.

European antidiscrimination directives have been accompanied by instruments of ‘soft law’, that is legal measures which do not compel implementation by organizations, and often limited to the level of recommendation (cf. Murgia & Poggio, 2014) as well as political and financial support. For example, the so-called Diversity Charters are short documents, signed on voluntary basis by public and private employers, that define the instruments whereby the organization commits itself to promote diversity and equal opportunities in the workplace, with a focus on the dimensions of difference stated

in the Directive n. 78/2000/EC and sponsored by institutional actors in several member States, Italy included (since 2009 with the ‘Carta per le pari opportunità e l’uguaglianza sul lavoro’). Since 2010, the European Commission financially support the European Platform of Diversity Charters, to foster the exchange of best practices among member States.

The first dimensions of diversity addressed by DM in practice and academia have been gender, ethnicity/race and age, both in U.S. and Europe, as they represent a visible demographical issue for employers. Fewer attention had been initially dedicated to other dimensions such as religion, sexual orientation and gender identity (cf. Ball et al., 2005; Köllen, 2016b). However, things have changed in the U.S. with respect to the latter. From early 1990s an increasing number of American corporations have started to adopt LGBT-supportive practices, and in 2017 the 92% of Fortune 500’s companies include the term ‘sexual orientation’ in their antidiscrimination policies, and the 82% the term ‘gender identity’, while the 50% offers some sort of transgender-inclusive policy (Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2017). This spread has been the result of an initial bottom-up process set about by grass-root activists (Creed & Scully, 2000; Creed et al., 2002; Raeburn, 2004) and a subsequent sudden isomorphic diffusion (Briscoe & Safford, 2008; Chuang et al., 2011; Everly & Schwarz, 2014). In Europe, the Directive n. 78/2000/EC, which recognizes six areas of discrimination in the workplace (gender, age, ethnicity and race, disability, religion and belief, and sexual orientation), have transposed into the national legal orders of member States in an fragmented way (Murgia & Poggio, 2014). Moreover, the report ‘Diversity management: research with the European Business Test Panel’ (2008) shows how most of the European companies in the panel had a non-integrated approach to DM, as they covered only some of the dimensions indicated in the Directive. The most covered dimension was age, followed by gender, ethnic and racial origin, and disability, whereas religion, belief and sexual orientation were covered only by few companies (Murgia & Poggio, 2014).

#### **1.4 Sexual orientation and gender diversity in organizations**

With respect to other visible dimensions of diversity, such as ethnicity, race, disability and gender, discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity has received far less attention. Assumptions that productive workplaces are asexual (cf. Gherardi, 1995) and that sexual orientation is separable from professional life (Köllen, 2016b) have made sexuality often irrelevant at the eye of both scholars and practitioners. Yet, heterosexism, intended ‘as an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behaviour, identity, relationship, or community’ (Herek, 1990, p. 316), still permeates most national contexts, and with it many organizations within these contexts. As a result, homosexual employees are still representing a marginalized and often silenced and ‘closeted’ minority, even in less heteronormative workplaces (Capell, Tzafrir, Enosh, & Dolan, 2017).

From the 1990s, a first wave of studies have addressed the theme of discrimination of sexual minorities focusing on the condition of LGBT people in heterosexist workplaces lacking any kind of formal or institutional protection, reporting arbitrary dismissals of gay and lesbian employees after their sexual identity disclosure as well as direct form of physical and psychological abuse (Ozturk, 2011).

Sexual minorities may experience workplace discrimination and silencing in different forms (M. P. Bell et al., 2011; Köllen, 2016b; Priola, Lasio, De Simone, & Serri, 2014). Formal discrimination involves barriers to job access and career development, wage inequalities (this being true especially for gay men but not for lesbians, see Ahmed & Hammarstedt, 2010; Botti & D’Ippoliti, 2014b; Klawitter, 2015; Patacchini, Ragusa, & Zenou, 2015) and denied access to other benefits, such as those related to the marital status; informal discrimination involves verbal and non-verbal harassment, homophobic jokes, lack of respect, hostility, and prejudice (Chung, 2001). The exclusion of LGBT employees’ partners from the company social events is a common example of informal discrimination resulting from institutionalized heteronormativity. According to Chung (2001b), ‘formal discrimination directly affects a person's vocational achievement or status, but informal discrimination may affect a person's morale, psychological well-being, and job performance, which



may also influence the person's career achievement' (p. 35).

Given that sexual orientation is an invisible dimension of diversity, a body of literature has inquired the decision of LGBT employees to disclose their sexual orientation in the workplace (for a review see Marrs and Staton 2016). Coming out is a multiple-stage, difficult process that result in different degrees of outward openness and implies risk and benefits considerations that are renegotiated each time an LGBT individual meets a counterpart that takes heterosexuality for granted. On the one hand, the choice to stay 'in the closet' (i.e. keeping one's sexual orientation concealed) implies a constant and dissonant cognitive effort that undermines job performance and harms psychological well-being (Gusmano, 2008; Madera, 2010). On the other hand, to come out in homophobic environments may be a costly alternative as well, that may lead to discrimination and limited career opportunities, and even to job termination in context where sexual orientation discrimination is not forbidden by law (Ozturk, 2011). In general, the fear of discrimination may lead LGBT workers to spend considerable resources in keeping separated their sexual identity from their professional identity or avoid vocational behaviour that could entail such tension (Chung, 1995, 2001). Moreover, the fear of being discriminated may lead to self-exclusion from both formal and informal professional networks with consequent penalties in career opportunities (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001).

To contrast the negative outcomes of discrimination on sexual minorities and to create a more inclusive workplace, American organizations have been the first to integrate 'sexual orientation' into their overall diversity management approaches, but in recent years also in other Western countries more and more organizations have started implementing specific diversity management initiatives in 'sexual orientation'. The shape of diversity management policies addressing sexual orientation may vary according to the characteristics of the organisation as well as its institutional context, especially with respect to the legislative framework. However, most established practices in Western companies include the creation of LGBT employee networks, awareness programs to remove taboos attached to homosexuality and transsexuality, training programs for the management, lesbian and gay marketing, mentoring, and equalization policies for homosexual and heterosexual unions (Köllen, 2016b). Hence,

a growing body of research has focused on the outcomes of LGBT-supportive workplace policies at both the individual and organizational level.

At the individual level, different studies indicate the positive outcomes of more inclusive workplaces. Workplaces where perceived discrimination is lower enhance sexual orientation disclosure (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001), which in turn leads to higher affective commitment, higher job satisfaction, higher perceived top management support, lower role ambiguity, lower role conflict, and a better work–life balance (Day and Schoenrade 1997). LGBT networks can help to retain employees and enhance homosexual employees' self-esteem (M. P. Bell et al., 2011; Colgan & McKearney, 2012; Frable, Platt, & Hoey, 1998). Gay or lesbian mentors and the inclusion of sexual orientation in organizational antidiscrimination policies have a positive impact on job satisfaction (Day & Schoenrade, 2000; Hebl, Tonidandel, & Ruggs, 2012) and lower the perceived workplace hostility (Tejeda, 2006). These results are in line with Lyons, Brenner and Fassinger (2005) finding that gay and lesbian employees tend to perceive the person-organization fit as more important than heterosexual workers do.

First studies considering the effects of multiple diversity practices have been carried out by Ragins and Cornwell (2001) and (Button, 2001) in the US, and (Köllen, 2016b) in Germany. Ragins and Cornwell (2001) examine the effect on perceived workplace discrimination of six different antidiscrimination practices (namely a written antidiscrimination policy indicating sexual orientation; the inclusion of sexual orientation in the definition of diversity; the inclusion of gay, lesbian, bisexual issues in diversity training; same-sex domestic partner benefits; gay, lesbian, bisexual resource or support groups; the invitation of same-sex partners at company social events), as well as the impact of having gay co-workers and supervisors. All the three factors lessen perceived workplace discrimination, but the highest effect is due to organizational practices, which are also directly associated to lower turnover intentions, higher organizational and career commitment, as well as higher compensations for gay and lesbian employees.

Similarly, Button's (2001) work find a negative aggregate effect of nine antidiscrimination practices on perceived treatment discrimination, and in turn higher levels of satisfaction and commitment by gay and lesbian employees. Finally, Köllen (2016) performs a finer grained analysis of the effect of different diversity management practices, dividing those that lessen the difference between homosexuality and heterosexuality within the organization from those that accentuate the difference. He finds that and find that the former, namely equalization of heterosexual and homosexual partnerships, internal thematization of homosexuality and gay marketing are more are more strongly related to positive psychological climates than the latter, namely LGBT networks and mentoring.

At the organizational level, Day and Greene (2008) consider the demographics American homosexual citizens, who represent around the 10% of the entire population and a portion of the workforce ranging from 3% to 12%, underlining the importance of the gay and lesbian community as both employees and consumers. In the so-called 'war for talent' firms should guarantee and communicate their inclusiveness to the LGBT community to enlarge the pool of potential qualified candidates on the one hand, and retain the most talented employee, on the other. In their book, Witeck and Combs (2006) reported how, in the US, 89% of LGBT employees valued important the they work for a company with written non-discrimination policies indicating sexual orientation, while the 91% valued important the presence equal benefits. Interestingly, also non-LGBT respondents gave importance to non-discrimination policies (72%) and equal benefits (79%). A case study in the UK (Guasp & Balfour, 2008) brought similar evidence, with LGB respondents trying to keep away from non-inclusive organizations. Looking at the demand side of the market, companies should consider the purchase power of the LGBT community, 'a market that makes its buying decisions in part on whether or not the company provides equal workplace benefits to its GL employees' (Day and Green 2008: 640). At least in the US, the LGBT community has already proven effective in boycotting companies whit anti-LGBT blemish, such as Target Corporation and Best Buy, which sponsored a Representative opposing same-sex unions, and Barilla, after its chairman made anti-gay remarks.

However, the business case for LGBT-supportive workplace policies is not clear cut yet. In

their review of 36 studies that assess links between such policies and business outcomes, Badgett and colleagues (2013) report a strong association between the policies and the degree of disclosure of employees' sexual orientation; a fairly strong association with less discrimination at work, better health, higher job satisfaction and job commitment; a possible association with organizational citizenship behaviours, improved co-worker relationships, lower insurance cost, increased creativity and innovation and improved stock prices; finally, they stress the need for further research to investigate the potential association between LGBT-supportive policies and other variables, such as litigation costs, the customer base and recruitment outcomes.

In any case, the business case for diversity results a crucial vehicle for the diffusion of inclusive practices (Creed, Scully, & Austin, 2002; Raeburn, 2004; Sears & Mallory, 2011). As noted above, Sears and Mallory (2011) showed how most of Fortune 500 companies and federal government contractors affirm that DM is good for their business. Moreover, the 53% of these organizations have specifically linked policies prohibiting sexual orientation and gender identity discrimination or a decision to extend domestic partner benefits to their employees to improving their bottom line.

In this strand of research, the relation between organizational practices supportive of sexual minorities and companies' financial performances has received particular attention, especially by diversity specialists willing to 'sell' the business case to companies (cf. Kelly & Dobbin, 1998; Kochan et al., 2003). The topic has been first researched by (Johnston & Malina, 2008), who looked at the stock prices of 203 companies before and after the release of the Human Rights Campaign's Corporate Equality Index (CEI), that assigns a score to each company according to its package of LGBT-supportive practices. Stock prices showed an increase just the day after the CEI was released, but not net impact over the analysis period of three days. The aggregate impact of LGBT-friendly practices on the organizations' financial performance has also been studied by Wang and Schwarz (2010). Their work correlates changes in the standardized Company Equality Index score with changes in firms' standardized stock prices trend during the following year, finding a positive association. Stock prices of firms with more progressive LGBT-friendly policies outperform those of

competing firms in the same industry with lower CEI scores. However, the methodology of the study does not allow for assessing the amount of change in the actual stock price.

But what triggered the adoption of LGBT-practices in context of institutionalized heterosexism? From early 2000s a small number of scholars have explored the processes by which an increasing number of corporations have started to implement such practices within the American context. A first wave of institutional scholars, combining institutional and social movement theory focused on the antecedents and mechanisms that led to the of adoption of such practices. Creed and Scully (2000) show how gay and lesbian employees strategically deploy their social identity in state and local political campaigns for non-discrimination legislation. By means of the concept of encounters, ‘through which individuals who identify with a category engage in some self-conscious and intentional performances that announce and enact who they are’ (p. 391), the authors show how gay and lesbian employees aim to advance social change projects that are like workplace instances of ‘micromobilization’. For example, the strategic deployment of sexual identity by lesbian and gay employees in face-to-face encounters with co-workers and supervisors and the use of narratives of everyday work life discrimination and injustice, helped to challenge stigma and stimulate the interlocutors’ identities of non-prejudiced persons. To claim inclusive practices like domestic partner benefits, activists employed their status of loyal corporate citizens to frame the reform as a business case, but also used higher order logics to frame LGBT-friendly policies as issues of broader civil rights, fairness, corporate social responsibility and competitive advantage in an increasingly diverse world. Similarly, Creed, Scully, and Austin, (2002) perform a frame analysis of the legitimating accounts for and against policies precluding workplace discrimination against gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people, such as domestic partner benefits and non-discrimination policies including sexual orientation. They focus on how social actors working at both the national level and within organizations use broader cultural accounts in building their legitimating accounts in local settings, and on how they fight over the alternative and conflicting meanings attributable to the same cultural logics (e.g. the ‘civil rights’ logic) to provide the common meanings and identities that mobilize local

participation in sustaining or changing institutional arrangements. ‘For example, advocates of non-discrimination legislation invoke a civil rights logic, asserting their standing as citizens entitled to, but denied, equal protection under the law. At the same time, opponents assert that gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) citizens do not and should not constitute a protected class and that they are simply immoral people’ (p. 476).

In her book *Lesbian and Gay Workplace Rights: Changing Corporate America from Inside Out*, Raeburn (2004) provides an in-depth exploration of the struggle of lesbian and gay activists to win domestic partner benefits in Fortune 1000 companies. The author describes how macro-level institutional opportunities, consisting of socio-political processes (e.g. laws on non-discrimination, benefits, and domestic partner registries), organizational field processes (e.g. benchmarking tools and reports from outside activist organizations) and professional and cultural processes (e.g. the new human resources paradigm framing diversity as a business imperative), and meso-level/organizational institutional opportunities (e.g. the presence of a diversity offices or management champions/executive sponsors), influenced the outcomes of activists and grassroots movement fighting for equitable benefits for the LGBT workforce in corporate America. Nevertheless, Raeburn (2004) stresses how activists’ efforts and strategies were crucial in changing corporate policies especially in the first round of adoption of domestic partner benefits, when institutional pressures were lower and the role of social movements and agency more prominent.

From early 1990s the diffusion among American corporations of inclusive practices addressing sexual minorities, such as domestic partner benefits, spread so widely that the sample of organizations at disposal of institutional scholars allow them to apply quantitative methods to estimate the impact of institutional variables on such diffusion process. In their analysis, Briscoe and Safford, (2008) look at the diffusion of domestic partner benefit among Fortune 500 firms from 1990 to 2005 to argue that, like President Nixon’s surprise visit to China in 1972, which led other countries to open relations with a controversial communist country, adoption of domestic partner benefits by activism-resistant firms signals to mainstream firms that an advocated practice has lost its controversial nature and hence

facilitates its diffusion in the field. Drawing on institutional theory, Chuang, Church and Ophir (2011) focus on the institutionalization of same-sex partner health benefits among Fortune 500 corporations between 1990 and 2003, estimating the magnitude of the interactive effect of DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) mechanisms of institutional isomorphic change. They measure coercive pressure on the base of state laws forbidding discrimination based on sexual orientation, mimetic pressure as the cumulative number of adoptions within industry and normative pressure as overall tenor in press coverage of the benefits. Their findings show that coercive pressures are more effective in combination with mimetic pressures, measured as the cumulative number of adoptions within industry. Yet the presence of mimetic pressures decreases the effectiveness of normative pressures, computed as overall tenor in press coverage of the same-sex partner benefits issue. To similar conclusions come Everly and Schwarz (2014), as they find that the state law dealing with gay rights in non-employment-related areas for the state where each company is headquartered and the adoption of progressive policies by other companies in the same industry, are positively related with the adoption of LGBT-friendly practices. The number of women serving on each Company's board of directors increases the likelihood of adoption of the practices as well.

The European country at the forefront in terms of diffusion of LGBT-inclusiveness on the part of organizations is probably the United Kingdom (cf. Colgan, 2011; Colgan, Creegan, McKearney, & Wright, 2007; Colgan & McKearney, 2012). In contrast with the American phenomenon, Colgan (2011) observes how the development of sexual orientation diversity policy and practice in the UK private sector has not been triggered by a clear-cut business case approach, but neither by a social justice one, as she stresses the importance of a more nuanced approach drawing on corporate social responsibility. In her words: 'some managers as well as LGBT and union representatives were keen to stress the role of an increasingly influential CSR agenda within their organisation. CSR was used by them as a unifying term to cover social justice, legislative and business case rationales' (pp. 731-732). Indeed, the role played by both LGBT trade union groups and company employee network groups have been important and even complementary means for visibility, community and voice for

LGBT employees (Colgan & McKearney, 2012).

### **1.5 The Italian context**

Italy represents a puzzling context to the study of sexual minorities. Different and often contrasting forces shape the institutional landscape. The presence of the Vatican has always represented a strong obstruction to address the issue of sexuality in general and of sexual orientation in particular, as the Church has delegitimized homosexuality either by not addressing the issue at all or labelling homosexuals as immoral because ‘against nature’ and forcefully out of the wedlock (Corbisiero & Amodeo, 2013; Gamberini, 2015). Although Italy is officially a secular state, the Church still has a considerable influence over several political, economic and social institutional areas of the country, such as education and academia, the health system and political parties (Ferrari & Ferrari, 2015). This has strengthened the retention of a social taboo over homosexuality up to late 1990s and made its existence largely ignored by both legislators and researchers (cf. Zanola, 2014). However, over the last decades different factors have contributed to make the issue of homosexuality more and more prominent in Italy. The establishment of an Italian LGBT movement in the 1970s, with the birth of the first LGBT association *Fuori!* (literally ‘out’, in Italian) in 1971 and, in 1985, of *Arcigay*, still today the largest and most notable LGBT association in Italy, brought the issue of homosexuality into the public discussion. In 1978 Fabris & Davis (1978) carried out the first quantitative sociological study considering homosexuality, followed by a series of publications inquiring the life experiences of gay, lesbian and transsexuals in Italy, the evolution of the homosexual relation, as well as the perception of homosexuality by Italian people. Changes in the regulatory framework first imposed by the European legislator, such as the directive 2000/78 on equal treatment in employment and occupation, also forced the Italian politics to address the issue from a legislative standpoint.



With the Legislative Decree n. 216/2003, Italy transposed into law the European directive 2000/78, prohibiting discrimination in the workplace also on the basis of sexual orientation. After the European Court of Human Rights condemned Italy for violating the right to private and family life of three homosexual couples in 2015 (Art. 8 of the European Convention of Human Rights, ECHR) and, in the same year, in its annual report on human rights and democracy the European Parliament recommended to Italy to provide LGBT citizens with legal institutions, albeit belatedly with respect to the most of other European countries, Italy has recognized same-sex civil unions with the Law n. 76/2016, which nevertheless does not afford to gay couples the same rights acknowledged to married ones, in particular with regard to the adoption of one partner's children. A law against homophobia and transphobia lacks as well. The Law will anyway force Italian organizations to put the LGBT issue in their agenda, at least to some extent. However, it could not be considered as a factor for the adoption of LGBT-friendly practices in our study, since it refers to organizations that decided to deal with the LGBT diversity issue before its enactment and most change for LGBTI people in Italy was due to courts sentences (ILGA Europe, 2016).

Estimates of the size of LGBT populations represent a challenge for researchers as their outcomes may vary. Data collection is made problematic because of the social stigma associated to homosexuality that makes participation and disclosure in surveys dependent on methodology and on the interviewee personal disposition, this leading often to underestimates (Coffman, Coffman, & Ericson, 2013). Moreover, the concept of homosexuality involves multiple dimensions, namely individuals' self-identity, sexual behaviours, sexual attraction and household relationships. These dimensions are related to each other but may be misaligned and none of them completely addresses the concept (Gates, 2011). The estimation of the transgender population is also troublesome, since self-identity may clash with gender expression or non-conformity (Gates 2011). Moreover, not only the size of the LGBT population but also measures of the intolerance toward diversity of sexual orientation seem to be substantially underestimated, since unacceptance of gay individuals is

perceived to be socially undesirable as well as homosexuality (Coffman et al., 2013). According to a report by the Italian National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT), in 2011:

Almost a million of people have self-declared homosexual or bisexual, the most among men, youngsters and in Central Italy. About two million have declared to have experimented in their life love or sexual intercourse or sexual attraction for people of the same sex. (ISTAT, 2012: 1)

But again, such estimation only considers those respondents who decided to come out, while 15,6 % of the respondents did not answer the question on sexual orientation and the 5% chose the option 'Other', without specification. We lack estimates about the LGBT share of the Italian workforce. Roughly, estimating the Italian workforce to be around 26 million, and considering the estimates by ISTAT (2012) about self-declaring homosexuals and bisexuals (1,6% of the Italian population in 2011), the LGBT workforce should amount to 416 thousand people, a number that risks being a large underestimation of the actual situation, reflecting the troubles in the collection of reliable data on such a population.

Data on sexual orientation discrimination in Italy shows a somehow conflicting picture. If, on the one hand, the general attitude seems to converge toward a more inclusive or tolerant approach toward homosexuality in the country, on the other acceptance is lower when symbols related to more traditional areas of institutional life are concerned. Considering data from ISTAT (2012), even though 61.1% of the Italian population between 18 and 74 years old thinks homosexuals are somehow discriminated and only 2.3% of Italian people think is tolerable that an employee does not hire a candidate with the right skills because homosexual, for the 41.1% a homosexual primary school teacher is unacceptable, for the 28.1% a doctor, for the 24.8% a politician. These values get significantly higher when taking into consideration only the South and the islands, where tolerance toward homosexuality is lower in general (ISTAT 2012). Similarly, according to the Special Eurobarometer (UE, 2015), 73% of people surveyed in Italy believe that discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation is widespread (EU28 average was 58%), and even though 72% of Italian

respondent think LGB people should have the same rights as heterosexual people, only 55% agree to the allowance of same sex marriages in Europe. This ambivalence, as well as the shifting regulatory framework, may be interpreted as symptoms of a process of cultural change, which is well captured by two data from a Pew Research Centre's survey (J. Bell, 2014). First, Italy is the European country where acceptance of homosexuality has grown the most from 2007 to 2013 (from 65% to 74%). Second, Italians over 50 and older are substantially less likely than younger people to say homosexuality should be accepted (67% against 86%) (PRC 2013). This generational gap was also evident in ISTAT report (2012), according to which only 37.8% of over 64 respondents consider acceptable an affective and sexual relation between two men, against the 66.9% of respondents belonging to the 18-34 cohort. As indicated by the Diversity Media Report (Azzalini, 2015), media coverage of LGBT issues has increased in the last decade, both in news and entertainment channels, with an enhancement of the quality of the message, measured in terms of accuracy for news and of inclusiveness for entertainment.

Hence, the inclusion of LGBT people is gaining increasing legitimacy in the Italian context but still face cultural, normative and regulative barriers. Even though beliefs are changing, norms and behaviours lag behind, as the always more favourable public opinion is accompanied by still significant levels of discrimination. Indeed, most of Italians seem aware of such discrimination, as 61.3% of the respondents to the ISTAT survey (2012) think homosexuals are somehow discriminated (the percentage raises to 80.3% with respect to transsexual people), while 'several cases of homophobic or transphobic hate speech by individuals with a public profile' have been reported by ILGA-Europe (2016, p. 93). On their part, the 40.3% of homosexual respondents declares to have been discriminated whether at school, looking for a job or in the workplace. Focusing on the workplace, 22.1% of homosexual respondents reported being discriminated on the workplace, against the 12.7% of heterosexual respondents. According to a report issued by the Italian LGBT association Arcigay based on a sample of 1461 LGBT workers (Arcigay, 2011), 26.6% of interviewees are

completely covert in the workplace, that is they have not come out with any of their colleagues, with the negative consequences that it entails in terms of performance and well-being.

Italian studies report different forms of discrimination toward LGBT workers. With respect to the hiring process, in their experimental study Patacchini, Ragusa and Zenou (2015) find out that the probability to be called back for an interview is lower of almost 30% for gay candidates implicitly revealing their sexual orientation in their CV, whereas lesbians do not face such discrimination. In their seminal work, Barbagli and Colombo (2007) delineate the high perceived risk of negative reactions to coming out in the workplace, in respect of career advancement opportunities, marginalization, harassment and mobbing and even dismissal. By means of three episodes captured while doing organizational ethnography, Bruni (2006) underlines also how discourses based on the heterosexual model of sexual practices and desire shapes organizational practices (and vice versa). Priola et al. (2014) report how even in Italian social cooperatives employing people who are disadvantaged in the labour market, a culture of silence constrains LGBT employees to keep their work identity separated from their sexual identity. Botti and D'Ippoliti (2014) find that LGB Italian people suffer from lower social inclusion in terms of labour market attachment, monetary poverty and housing conditions.

The diffusion of DM in Italy is still marginal in comparison to other Western countries, also in virtue of the peculiarities of the Italian productive system: small and medium-sized enterprises represent the most important element of the economic fabric, the internalization and diversification of work are still developing and, furthermore, some cultural and political features, such as those abovementioned, contribute to the creation of an hostile climate for diversity (Murgia & Poggio, 2014). Nevertheless, global diversity programs of multinational companies with Italian branches, the increasing participation of women and immigrants to the labour market, the drastic ageing of the labour force, the demand for better work-life balance arrangements, plus the stimulus from the European Union, gave birth in late 2000s to a small community of diversity experts, working with few big companies mostly based in the North of the country (ibid.). According to Murgia and Poggio

(2014), diversity programs in Italy tend to address gender in the first place, then ethnicity, disability and age, also considering the national legislative pressure in these respects; religion and sexual orientation are the less considered areas. As Basaglia (2010) confirms, by 2010 only few big companies operating in Italy made explicit reference to sexual orientation in their anti-discrimination policies, all of them being subsidiaries of foreign-based companies. But the situation has been slightly changing in last years. In 2013, within the programme ‘Combating discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity’ initiated by the Council of Europe in line with the Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)5 of the Committee of Ministers, the Italian National Office Against Racial Discrimination (UNAR) formulated the National Strategy for the prevention and countering of discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity in collaboration with the major Italian LGBT organizations, indicating the promotion of sexual orientation diversity management policies as a specific objective of the strategy and setting up a task force of Italian LGBT organizations (UNAR, 2013). The most relevant one in terms of size and media exposure is *Arcigay*, almost unanimously recognized as the voice of the Italian LGBT community. Yet it does not directly address work-related issues, if not at local level. Among the members of the UNAR working group two actors directly deals with organizations by promoting sexual orientation anti-discriminatory policies. The first one is *Parks – Liberi e Uguali* (‘Parks – Free and Equal’), a non-profit organization founded in 2010 whose members are employers; its mission is to promote diversity management practices that enhance business opportunities for its members, through the inclusion of the LGBT population in the workplace. It yearly issues the aforementioned ‘LGBT Diversity Index’, a benchmark tool to measure companies’ policies and practices relative to the inclusion of the LGBT workforce. The second organization is *CGIL Nuovi Diritti* (‘CGIL New Rights’), a department of the Italian General Confederation of Labour (CGIL), the oldest and largest Italian trade union confederation, founded in early ’90s and specifically addressing the issues of LGBT workers. Even though not belonging to the UNAR’s task force because of its recent foundation, another trade union confederation department directly deals with LGBT issues in the workplace, that is the *UIL Coordinamento Diritti* (‘UIL Rights

Coordination') department. It has been founded in 2013 within the Italian Labour Union (UIL), the third largest Italian trade union confederation, with the function of integrating its equal opportunities office with a specific focus on discriminations related to sexual orientation and identity. Likewise, the lawyers' association *Rete Lenford*, which provides legal assistance to LGBT people also in relation to workplace issues, is worthy of note.

Taking as an indicator the number of participants to the LGBT Diversity Index, the number of companies participating has risen from 19 in 2013 to 42 in 2016. Even though numbers show the still marginal diffusion of the phenomenon, the recent promulgation of the Law n. 76/2016 recognizing same-sex civil unions will anyway force many other organizations to address the issue of sexual orientation, if only to prevent themselves from breaking the anti-discrimination law. For instance, the extension of partner benefits to same-sex civil unions is now automatic and the employer can no longer ignore the sexual orientation of those workers claiming the benefit because of their same-sex union.

When dealing with Italian HRM system some specificities of the industrial relations system should be borne in mind. It is a substantially voluntarist system, as direct State intervention is infrequent and collective agreements and their coverage are not legally defined, and neither is their implementation. However, they are considered as guide by both employers defining working conditions and by judges in labour disputes. Besides the highly centralized level of negotiation of cross-sectoral agreements, negotiation takes mostly place at two levels: the national industry (or sectoral) level, that sets the working standards for an entire industry (or sector) and the company or plant level, integrating national agreements with ameliorations specific to the single workplace. The implementation of the LG(BT)-friendly practices under study in this paper is located on this second level. Even though the balance between centralization and decentralization frequently changed, national sectoral collective agreements (covering *de facto* almost 80% of workers) are still important instruments to define working conditions (Colombo & Regalia, 2016). In terms of union density, the Italian context is very much comparable to the context of most other European countries, such as Belgium, Norway, or Austria (OECD, 2015).



## **2. Theoretical framework**

It is hard to define what ‘an institution’ is. Different disciplines and theories emphasise certain aspects and neglect others and provide definitions greater or lesser general in scope. For example, institutional economists tend to consider institutions as ‘the rules of the game’ by which economic actors play (cf. North, 1991), while institutional theorists see them as socially constructed systems of norms that produce stable patterns of behaviour (cf. Jepperson, 1991). A relatively recent definition is the one provided by Scott (2008):

Institutions are social structures that have attained a high degree of resilience. [They] are composed of cultural-cognitive, normative, and regulative elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life. Institutions are transmitted by various types of carriers, including symbolic systems, relational systems, routines, and artifacts. Institutions operate at different levels of jurisdiction, from the world system to localized interpersonal relationships. Institutions by definition connote stability but are subject to change processes, both incremental and discontinuous. (p. 48)

Heterosexism has been previously defined ‘as an ideological system that denies, denigrates, and stigmatizes any non-heterosexual form of behaviour, identity, relationship, or community’ (Herek, 1990: 316). Heterosexism entangles its roots with heteronormativity, a (partly overlapping) concept that refers to the set of institutionalised symbols, norms and material practices that create and reproduce the belief that people fall into distinct and complementary genders (male and female) that aligns with heterosexuality and predetermined roles in society (for an example of how patriarchal institutions influence the experiences of lesbian, gay and bisexual employees in Turkey see Ozturk, 2011). Therefore, the scenario depicted in the previous chapter made me consider heteronormativity



in Italian organizations as a long-lasting institution operating at multiple levels through a multitude of both symbolic and material carriers (e.g. marriage and all the representations and narratives associated with the ‘traditional’ family and heterosexuality, such as wedding rings, pictures of children and heterosexual couples). From another perspective, institutionalised is also the assumption that sexuality undermines organizational productivity and hence it must be excluded from professional and organizational discourses (Burrell, 1984; Köllen, 2016b). Therefore, the adoption of LGBT-friendly practices in Italy can be framed as the onset of an institutional change process, whereby particular sets of beliefs and practices might gain legitimacy in an institutional field and became eventually taken for granted. Institutional change requires a certain amount of institutional work, ‘the purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions’ (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 215).

In the first part of this chapter I briefly review neo-institutional theory and the way this butch of scholars has dealt with institutional change and the so ‘called paradox of embedded agency’. In the second section, I focus on institutional entrepreneurship as a notion developed to endogenously deal with institutional change. In the last section of the chapter I point out the knowledge gaps and the objectives of the present study.

## **2.1 The institutional analysis of organizations**

According to Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury (2012), neo-institutional theory and the institutional analysis of organizations can be conceived as a set of ‘orienting strategies’, providing the guidelines for empirical and theoretical research and signalling the main theoretical issues to be addressed. Its origins are often made coincide with Meyer and Rowan's (1977) seminal paper *Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony*, where the authors focus on three central concepts, institutional rules, legitimacy and isomorphism. The main contribution of their work relies in the idea that legitimacy is a source of formal organization structure that may be

decoupled from the configuration of the technical activity of the organizations. In other words, to comply with the requirements of the institutional environment (i.e. cultural myths and symbols), organizations develop formal structural similarities that may not match with their own technical needs. In other words, structural isomorphism among organizations is due to their need to conform to the cultural requirements of the environment and may imply decoupling from their technical core mission. In contrast with previous interpretations, Meyer and Rowan (1977) do not intend decoupling as an inefficiency deriving from the lack of consensus between the external requirements of the organization's institutional environment and its internal technical environment, but they rather see the capacity to deal with such conflict as a source of organizational success.

At the micro level of analysis, Meyer and Rowan (1977) theoretical contribution hinges on Zucker's (1977) findings. Her study shows how individuals perceive taken-for-granted institutions as 'facts', thereby the cognitive perception of institutions becomes analytically independent from the sanctioning capacity of the institutional environment. As Thornton and colleagues underline, the most relevant implications are that we can hardly isolate the effect of institutionalization (i.e. taken-for-granted external, cultural prescriptions) from strategic responses to resource dependence (e.g. conformity to the standards set by a regulative body in order to get certifications and/or funds), and that 'socialization is not necessary for the institutionalization of new ideas and practices to be transmitted, which means that diffusion is not necessarily time dependent' (p. 24). Only few years later, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) shifted the focus of attention from the societal-level to the organizational field. According to them, the legitimation of an organizational behaviour stems from the structuration of the corresponding organizational field, intended as 'those organizations that, in aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resources, product consumers, regulatory agencies, and the other organizations that produce similar services or products' (p. 148). More specifically, their work focuses on the causes of organizational homogeneity, namely the process of isomorphism. They identify two types of isomorphism, competitive and institutional. The former is of economic nature and refers to the competition for resources and costumers; the latter

has a social connotation and refers to the struggle for political power and institutional legitimacy. This theorization is in line with a two-stage model of innovation that sees first adopters driven by economic performance and later adopters by the quest for legitimacy (Thornton et al., 2012; cf. Tolbert & Zucker, 1983). In the same paper, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) identify three sources of rationalization of organizational isomorphism: coercive, normative and mimetic. Coercive isomorphism stems from political influence and the problem of legitimacy. It ‘results from both formal and informal pressures exerted on organizations by other organization upon which they are dependent and by cultural expectations in the society within which organizations functions’ (p. 150). Normative isomorphism is associated with professionalization, namely to the rules and methods which characterized a certain occupational category and establishing ‘a cognitive base and legitimation for their occupational autonomy’ (p. 152). Finally, mimetic isomorphism results from ‘standard response to uncertainty’ (p. 151) and is basically concerned with the adoption of solutions already adopted by others. The central proposition of DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) theory is that, rather than from competition and the need for efficiency, isomorphism of organizational forms and practices is ‘rationalized’ by the increasing structuration of organizational fields. Factors positively related to the field’s level of structuration are: (i) the level of interaction among organizations in the field, (ii) the emergence of interorganizational structures of domination and patterns of coalition, (iii) the amount of information in the field that the organization must attend and (iv) the level of awareness among the participants in a set of organizations that they are involved in a common enterprise. The process of structuration of a field varies according to the alignment of field activities with the profession, the state and the market.

One of the problems faced by institutional theory thus far is the duality between technical and institutional environments or, in other terms, the relation between the material and symbolic dimension of institutions. To account for both institutional reproduction and disappearance the disentanglement of the duality is crucial. To this end, DiMaggio (1988) himself introduced the notion of institutional entrepreneurship, referring to powerful political actors, whose effort aims either at the

maintenance and reproduction of existing institutions or at their dismantling with the consequent creations of new ones, depending on their self-interest. Although accounting for the reproduction and creation of institutions, DiMaggio's (1988) concept draws on the rational choice theory assumption of a self-interested agents' behaviour, hence not addressing the duality of interest and culture and leaving unexplored the relation of the material and symbolic nature of institutions. An attempt to solve the duality was brought forward by March and Olsen (1984, 1989) who developed a twofold concept of rationality, splitting it up in a logic of instrumentalism and a logic of appropriateness. The former accounts for the self-interested utility of the agent, while the latter refer to his/her position in the relevant social context, namely his/her relations and obligations to others. Yet, these theoretical advancements still miss to account for 'the old duality between interest and norms and does not specify how norms themselves are likely to vary with situations of cultural content' (Thornton et al. 2012: 30).

In early 1990s, the duality context was finally addressed by Friedland and Alford (1991), who redefined the concept of rationality as a changing set of logics varying according to the institutional context. They take the distance from the previous separation between interest and culture, arguing that a new theory was needed to show how interests are institutionally shaped. According to them this process originates at the societal-level and not, as stated by DiMaggio and Powell (1983), through the structuration of the organizational field level. Indeed, Friedland and Alford (1991) claim that this misconception derives from DiMaggio and Powell's (1983) isolation of interest and power from the influence of superior level institutions, as they maintain a 'materialist-idealist dualism in which actors' interests can be understood independently of actors' understandings' (Thornton et al., 2012: 41), whereas, according to Friedland and Alford, the attributes of organizational fields must be considered taking into consideration the institutional context they are embedded in.

In Friedland and Alford's (1991) theory, institutions operate at different levels of analysis: individual, organizational and societal. The different levels are embedded in one another, but they can also be decomposed, allowing for decoupling and autonomy of elements within and across different

institutional orders. The partial autonomy of elements let room for conflict among them, thus empowering agents' and organizations' strategic behaviour through their manipulation both at the material (practices) and ideal (symbols) level (Thornton et al., 2012).

Friedland and Alford (1991) organize institutions according to different institutional orders, namely Christian religion, the nuclear family, the bureaucratic state, the capitalist market and democracy. The institutional order of the market is focused on the 'accumulation, codification, and pricing of human activity' (Friedland and Alford 1991: 249). The institutional order of religion focuses on an explanation for the origin of the world and in converting all issues into expression of absolute moral principles based on faith. The institutional order of the family focuses on converting social relations into reciprocal and unconditional obligations oriented to the reproduction of family members. The focus of the institutional order of the democratic state is to convert diverse issues into consensus (Thornton et al., 2012). This framework implies a notion of culture and rationality as neither homogeneous nor static. Heterogeneity is due to the presence of different institutional orders, influencing individuals' consciousness and behaviour, thus their interpretation of rationality, according to their position in the interinstitutional system. In other words, the rational-cultural dualism is overcome since the two redefine each other in relation to the influence of different institutional orders over individual and organizational cognition. Variation is enabled by the externalization of culture into practices and vocabularies that on the one hand shape actors' behaviour and on the other can be manipulated by them, since their interpretation can be conflicting or contradictory across different institutional orders (Thornton et al., 2012).

To sum up, the interinstitutional logics perspective delineated by Friedland and Alford (1991) entails a non-functionalist conception of society as a 'potentially contradictory interinstitutional system' (p. 240), where individuals and institutions may have trans-rational views of reality providing them with at least partial autonomy from organizational-field-level dynamics (cf. DiMaggio and Powell 1983).

In parallel to Friedland and Alford (1991), DiMaggio (1991) and Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) pioneered a strictly connected strand of research referred to as logic of action. Even though more focused ‘on the sense and decision-making consequences of different institutional logics than on the role institutionalization in shaping logics’ (Thornton et al. 2012: 35), this research has been the first to show how sources of rationality changes according to different institutional orders, thus overcoming the longstanding dualism between rational and non-rational behaviour. For instance, making use of ideal types, DiMaggio’s (1991) work describes how a power struggle based on two different cultural models – a new professional logic uphold by curators and museum professionals versus a community logic maintained by elite upper classes and their collectors – led to the structuration of the organizational fields of art museums.

Finally, an alternative (and perhaps more popular) approach in the institutional analysis of organizations is the one provided by Scott (2008). Scott’s work consists basically in a typology of literature on institutional approaches and carriers and hinges on the concepts of institutional pillars and carriers. Institutional pillars are the key elements that constitute or support institutions. The regulative pillar focuses primarily on explicit regulatory processes concerning ‘the capacity to establish rules, inspect others’ conformity to them, and, as necessary, manipulate sanctions—rewards or punishments—in an attempt to influence future behaviour’ (Scott 2008: 57). The normative pillar concerns normative rules that introduce a prescriptive, evaluative, and obligatory dimension into social life and involves the specification and application of specific values and norms to the collectivity or to a part of it, depending on the role of its components. The cultural-cognitive pillar regards ‘the shared conceptions that constitute the nature of social reality and create the frames through which meaning is made’ (ibid. p. 67), and is mainly concerned with the individual internal representation of reality. Table 3.1 orders the institutional pillars on the X-axis and, on the Y-axis, the main dimensions explored by institutional scholars. In their account of Scott’s work, Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury (2012) pose special attention over the Mechanisms dimension, which directly refers to DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) mechanisms of structural isomorphism. If they implicitly agree

upon the alignment of the regulative pillar with coercive isomorphism ‘in the sense of pressures for conformity exerted on organizations stemming from government mandate and existing in a common legal environment’ (p. 37), they criticize the cross-classification regarding the other two pillars, namely the normative and the cultural-cognitive. According to them the alignment of the former with DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) normative isomorphism is not analytically discrete: while Scott’s (2008) table considers the legitimacy of the normative pillar as ‘morally governed’, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) normative isomorphism derives from professionalization (cf. Meyer and Rowan 1977), ‘which is often associated with science and expert knowledge of professional value of what is proper based on similar education and training. Scott’s concept of morally governed behaviour is narrower and not necessarily the same as what is professionally advocated’ (Thornton et al. 2012: 38). Overall, Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury (2012) argue that the influence of cultural-cognitive perceptions can be extended to the regulative and the normative pillars (e.g. in the interpretation of an ambiguous law) as they refer to more general and abstract concepts. In their words, ‘norms and regulations are elements of culture and cognition, and culture and cognition are how we as individuals come to understand the meaning of norms and regulations’ (p. 39).

*Table 2.1 The three pillars of institutions. (Source: Scott, 2008)*

	<i>Regulative</i>	<i>Normative</i>	<i>Cultural-Cognitive</i>
<i>Basis of compliance</i>	Expedience	Social obligation	Taken-for-grantedness Shared understanding
<i>Basis of order</i>	Regulative rules	Binding expectations	Constitutive schema
<i>Mechanisms</i>	Coercive	Normative	Mimetic
<i>Logic</i>	Instrumentality	Appropriateness	Orthodoxy
<i>Indicators</i>	Rules Laws Sanctions	Certification Accreditation	Common beliefs Shared logics of action Isomorphism
<i>Affect</i>	Fear Guilt/ Innocence	Shame/Honor	Certainty/Confusion
<i>Basis of legitimacy</i>	Legally sanctioned	Morally governed	Comprehensible Recognizable Culturally supported

According to Scott (2008) institutional elements (i.e. the ‘pillars’) move from place to place and time to time with the help of institutional carriers (see Table 3.2). He classifies carriers in four categories: symbolic systems, relational systems, routines and artefacts. Symbolic systems comprise models, classifications, representations, and logics and can be compared to the concept of habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). Relational systems carriers include the patterned expectations deriving from social structures, for instance in terms of rules and beliefs related to a specific social position; routines carriers refer to accustomed actions performed by actors based on unarticulated knowledge, such as standard operating procedures; artefacts carriers are materials sprung from humans’ inventiveness, designed to accomplish specific tasks.

*Table 2.2 Institutional pillars and carriers. (Source: Thornton et al., 2012)*

Carrier	Regulative	Normative	Cultural–cognitive
Symbolic systems	Rules, laws	Values, expectations	Categories, typifications, <b>schema</b>
<b>Relational systems</b>	Governance systems, power systems	Regimes, authority systems	Structural isomorphism, identities
Routines	Protocols, standard operating procedures	Jobs, roles, obedience to duty	Scripts
<b>Artifacts</b>	<b>Objects complying with mandated specifications</b>	<b>Objects meeting conventions, standards</b>	<b>Objects possessing symbolic value</b>

Thornton, Ocasio and Lounsbury (2012) highlight the inability of Scott’s theory to account for agentic behaviour, seen as either routine and mindless or as strategic in a resource-dependence fashion. On their side, they propose an ‘institutional logics perspective’ that categorizes societal influences as an inter-institutional system, composed by several institutional orders – the family, the community, the religion, the State, the market, the profession and the corporation – whose logics can be classified according to ‘elemental categories’ which represent the cultural symbols and material practices particular to each order. The coupling of each category with the institutional orders give birth to a fluid set of institutional logics that operate at multiple levels: the societal, the organizational-



field and the individual level. The stability and change of the system can therefore derive from both top-down and bottom-up dynamics. The institutional logics perspective relies on the assumption of the embeddedness of individuals and organizations within prevailing institutional logics. Yet, its main claim and distinction from previous orienting strategies is the partial autonomy of actors from social structure and their capacity to actually change institutions. This feature allows for an understanding of institutions as forces capable of both enabling and constraining individuals and organizations. In simpler terms, the institutional logics perspective can account for both institutional stability and change. Another key aspect of the institutional logics perspective resides in his account of the dynamics of both the material and the symbolic dimension of institutions. The material aspects concern the influence of institutions on structure and practices, while the symbolic one refers ‘to ideation and meaning, recognizing that the symbolic and the material are intertwined and constitutive of one another’ (Thornton et al. 2012: 10). Among the others, Friedland and Alford (1991) and Granovetter (1985) have stressed how social structures and culture deeply influence economic activity, and how the analysis of practices and symbols is essential for the understanding of institutions. One of the main challenges for institutional logics scholars is indeed the partition of symbols from structural effects and the study of their interaction, that is the influence of culture upon action (Thornton et al. 2012). Finally, the institutional logics perspective conceives institutions as historically contingent, to account for the emergence, re-emergence and change of institutional logics themselves.

## **2.2 Institutional change and institutional entrepreneurs**

Institutional change falls within the recently coined notion of institutional work, that is ‘the purposive action of individuals and organizations aimed at creating, maintaining and disrupting institutions’ (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006, p. 215), and, more specifically, concerns the process whereby new institutional arrangements gain legitimacy and become eventually taken for granted.

The outcome is not determined yet: new institutions might replace or change incumbent ones (e.g., Sherer & Lee, 2002), or blend with them and spawn new institutional arrangements (e.g., Raviola & Norbäck, 2013), or even loose the contest for institutionalization and get rejected in favour of the incumbent institutional order (cf. Davis & Anderson, 2008). In other terms, institutional change is an open-ended process, which can derive from the bottom-up initiative of powerful actors (cf. Fligstein, 2001) as well as emerge from bottom-up, ‘practice driven’ dynamics (Smets, Morris, & Greenwood, 2012).

From a theoretical standpoint, institutional change inevitably ends up addressing the long-standing debate on the relation occurring structure and agency and the so-called paradox of embedded agency, expressed by Holm (1995) with the fitting question: ‘how institutional change is possible if actors’ intentions, actions, and rationality are conditioned by the institutions that they wish to change?’ (Holm, 1995: 398).

If in the late 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s, organization theories, and economic theories of organization, focused on actors’ decisions, leaving aside the social environment surrounding the organization, from late 1970s new institutionalists in organizational theory have started to consider the influence of actors’ environment on their preferences, decisions and behaviours. As previously noticed, new institutionalists’ attention has originally focused on the issues of organizational homogeneity and institutional reproduction (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Tolbert & Zucker, 1983), trying to explain how organizations tend to uniformly adapt to their institutional environment, even when the quest for legitimacy and support put organization in contrast with their technical core mission (Meyer and Rowan 1977). After a period of condensed attention over isomorphism and its dynamics, in 1988 it is DiMaggio again to call for an institutional theory able to provide explanation for the deconstruction of institutions and the creation of new ones. In the same chapter, DiMaggio provides what is considered to be the first definition of institutional entrepreneur, arguing that ‘new institutions arise when organized actors with sufficient resources (institutional entrepreneurs) see in them an opportunity to realize interests that they value highly’ (DiMaggio, 1988: 14), giving birth to

a lively debate on the role of actors in the creation, diffusion and consolidation of new institution and thus back to the paradox of embedded agency.

The concept of actors' agency refers to their 'ability to intentionally pursue interests and exert some effect on their social environment' (Battilana et al., 2009), and, within the tenets of institutional theory, it comes to generate a strong tension with institutional determinism. The disentanglement of agency from social structure goes at the heart of social sciences, as it concerns 'the problem of reducing structure to action, or action to structure, or of merging both' (Leca & Naccache, 2006, p. 628), also known as the problem of 'conflation'. The task is complex as it requires a theory of action that considers the influence of the context over the individual, allowing at the same time for actors' freedom to change the same institutions they are embedded in. In other terms, the issue stays in balancing the degree of agency of the institutional entrepreneur with the influence of the institutional framework in which he is embedded by looking at the processes by which the one interacts with the other.

Going back to my research then, I arise the issue of how actors working in an organizational environment characterized by a heterosexist conception of sexual and affective relations can disembody themselves from such a context, envision and champion new practices to create a more inclusive workplace.

The risk is to get astray toward the extremes and, on the one hand, to depict institutional entrepreneur as a 'hero' characterized by superior rationality and disembeddedness, thus contradicting the assumption of institutional embeddedness and thwarting the attempt to reconcile agency into institutional theory (Battilana et al., 2009), and, on the other hand, to black boxing the process of institutional change and surrender to a functionalist and/or deterministic conception of society. In this respect, institutional entrepreneurship scholarship directly contributes to the construction of a theory of actions that takes into account the reciprocal influence of structure (i.e., institutions) and agency over each other, by focusing on the properties of actors who are involved in institutional change and of their socio-economic environment.

Organizational fields have been defined by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) as ‘sets of organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life; key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products’ (pp. 148-149). In their review, Hardy and Maguire (2008) stress how initiating field conditions may be crucial for the availability of means and ends for institutional change, and classify them into ‘stimuli’ and ‘states’. Uncertainty, the presence of identified problems and the related market feedbacks, the intensity of tensions and contradictions always present in the organizational field are stimuli that foster institutional change, providing opportunity and means to the institutional entrepreneur. By ‘states’, the authors refer to the state of maturity of the organizational field, whether emerging, mature and stable or in crisis. Similarly, Battilana et al. (2009) consider also the degree institutionalization and of heterogeneity, ‘that is, the variance in the characteristics of different institutional arrangements’ (p. 75), as characteristics of the organizational field that might play a role in enabling institutional entrepreneurship.

Although the characteristics of a given field might prompt institutional change to a certain extent,

[...] all actors embedded in the same field are not equally likely to act as institutional entrepreneurs, the point being that in the face of a range of field-level factors that encourage institutional entrepreneurship, only some actors will exploit the opportunity to become institutional entrepreneurs. (Battilana et al., 2009, p. 75)

If DiMaggio (1988) has already identified institutional entrepreneurs as those actors endowed with sufficient resources and interest for new institutional arrangements, Battilana and colleagues (2009) integrate his definition by setting two more conditions to be met to enter the realm of institutional entrepreneurship: institutional entrepreneurs are those change agents that must ‘(1) initiate divergent changes; and (2) actively participate in the implementation of these changes’ (p. 68).

By ‘divergent changes’ the authors refer to ‘changes that break with the institutionalized template for organizing within a given institutional context’ (p. 68).

A relevant portion of the literature on institutional entrepreneurship has dealt with the interrelated attributes that characterize institutional entrepreneurs and permit them to embark in institutional change (Battilana et al., 2009; Hardy & Maguire, 2008). A first set of studies has explored the properties of institutional entrepreneurs that ‘distinguish institutional entrepreneurs from others in the field, and allow them to envision and promote alternative arrangements’ (Hardy & Maguire, 2008, p. 200). For example, some studies relying on critical realism (Leca & Naccache, 2006; Mutch, 2007) has emphasized the importance of institutional entrepreneurs’ reflexivity, which allows them to disembed from the current institutional order and conceive new institutional solutions; this is the case, reported by Leca and Naccache (2006), of ARESE, a social rating agency which contributed to the institutionalization of Social Responsible Investment in France.

A second set of studies has focused on the position of institutional entrepreneurs in a specific field (Battilana, et al. 2009; Hardy and Maguire 2008), intended as their perception of the field itself and its institutional contradictions, as well as their access to different available resources. An example from this second stream of studies is the paper by Maguire, Auteurs and Lawrence (2004), in which the authors show how 9 institutional entrepreneurs made use of their ‘subject position’ to legitimate themselves with different stakeholders in the emerging organizational field of HIV/AIDS treatments advocacy in Canada. Yet, studies in this stream have produced conflicting findings: both lower-status organizations, such as Sun Microsystems in early 1990s during its quest to establish Java technology as a standard (Garud, Jain, & Kumaraswamy, 2002), and high-status organizations, such as the big five accounting firms in their attempt to implement new organizational forms (Greenwood & Suddaby, 2006), have been found to initiate divergent changes . This may be due to differences in field characteristics as well as to the type of institutions affected by the divergent change (Battilana et al., 2009).

Hardy and Maguire (2008) identify a third set of studies that has explored the set of strategies, skills and abilities adopted by institutional entrepreneurs to achieve institutional change. The authors further classify the literature in this stream in three main sub-areas by which entrepreneurs deploy their strategies. The first sub-area concerns 'resource mobilization', intended as the material resources mobilized to gather the support of others, through material reward and punishment mechanisms. Such mobilization might also involve formal authority and social capital (Battilana et al. 2009). The second sub-area involves the construction of 'rationales' or reasons that underpin the institutional change at stake. This area is strategically relevant to involve and mobilize people around the project of change. For that reason, social movement theory has been largely adopted for accounting how institutional entrepreneurs create coherent interpretative structures referred to as 'collective action frames' (Hardy and Maguire, 2008, p. 208). Such framing activity consists of three components, namely diagnostic framing, identifying the problems change helps to resolve; prognostic framing, casting the promoted change as a better solution than previous arrangement; and motivational framing, providing compelling reasons to support the new vision being promoted (Battilana et al., 2009) and theorizing the new institutional arrangement as 'necessary' or more efficient/effective (Hardy & Maguire, 2008: 208). Since the motivation and involvement of other actors is, by definition, necessary to achieve institutional change, institutional entrepreneurs recur to discourse and rhetorical strategies (Battilana et al., 2009) that refer to established institutional logics:

[...] institutional change agents are unlikely to invent totally new frames or logics of action unfamiliar to other participants, because to do so would make it difficult and costly to gain consensus and support from those participants. Instead, agents are likely to adopt a frame or set of frames available in the broader heterogeneous institutional context—a frame that is sufficiently incompatible with the existing institutional arrangements to generate a fundamental departure from the past while also sufficiently resonant with some existing

societal systems of belief to mobilize substantial support and resources from other participants [...]. (Seo & Creed, 2002, p. 236)

Coherently with this view, Hardy and Maguire (2008) talk of ‘interpretative struggles’ (p. 205), that is, the activities undertaken by institutional entrepreneurs to assign a preferred meaning over a practice, or exploit a certain meaning as a resource to foster an institutional change. However, meanings must not be taken as standardized labels that actors may attach over different practices, but rather as mouldable elements that they interpret and translate within and across institutional fields, in a process of complex and continuous negotiation (Hardy & Maguire, 2008). The context in which legitimating accounts and meanings are produced and/or translated takes particular importance and makes institutional change to be always considered as culturally and historically located.

The last sub-area concerns ‘relations’, the setup of collaborative networks (e.g., partnerships, coalitions, etc.) partaking at the instatement of new institutions. Indeed, ‘given that institutional entrepreneurship is about altering deeply embedded norms, values and practices, it is not surprising that it depends upon more than a single individual or organization’ (Hardy & Maguire, p. 209); more in general, institutional change should be conceived as an increasingly collective process.

The Italian context did not present sufficient institutional pressure to elicit a process of institutional change addressing the heteronormativity of its organizational settings, at least before the enactment of the Law 76/2016 regulating same-sex civil unions. Yet, a small group of organizations decided in the late 2000s to implement a series of LGBT-friendly practices, with the aim of creating more. This research aims to explain why and how this process came about in these organizations. Once observed that actors’ agency played a central role in this divergent organizational institutional shift, I relied on the notion of institutional entrepreneurship to qualify the actors who intervened in the take-off and implementation of change, and frame their features in relation to the characteristics of the change process itself. Moreover, it can be assumed that the embeddedness of LG(BT)-friendly practices in the European stakeholder-oriented and collective HRM model has an impact on the

emergence of specific entrepreneurs and their interplay in the field of sexual orientation diversity management. Given the fact that research on this issue has until now exclusively focused American settings, where the HRM model is more shareholder oriented and less tied with collective representation, this work also aims to contribute to this debate from a European perspective.

### **2.3 Research gaps and objectives of the present study**

As pointed out in the previous chapter, sexual orientation in the workplace has received very scant attention in the Italian organizational debate (Priola et al., 2014) and the adoption of LGBT-friendly practices is a recent phenomenon. To my knowledge the first cases of adoption of inclusive policies toward the LGBT population in Italy date back to 2010, when 7 companies were gathered by a former HR Director to found Parks – Liberi e Uguali, an employer association with the explicit purpose to promote and advise on diversity management with a special focus on sexual orientation and gender identity. Besides Italy, this phenomenon has been overlooked in all but the American and (to a minor degree) the British context. Considering the difference between the American, shareholder oriented model and the European, where different stakeholders, the national culture, national legislation, State involvement, and trade union representation play a major role in the definition of HR practices (Brewster, 2004; Mayrhofer et al., 2012), the study of the Italian context can shed more light on how the each model influence the adoption of controversial practices. The findings relatives to the development of sexual orientation diversity policy and practice in the UK are to a large extent consistent with this view. The impact of the Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003 and the role played by LGBT trade union groups and company employee network groups were indeed relevant in this process (Colgan et al., 2007; Colgan & McKearney, 2012), in a context where the creation of LGBT-inclusive workplaces is conceived more as a corporate social responsibility issue than a business or a social justice imperative for the organization (Colgan, 2011). Nevertheless, Italy presents significant legislative and cultural differences from Britain, such as the presence of the



Vatican and (before 2016) the absence of any normative reference to same-sex couples. Thus, in the first place the present work seek to enrich LGBT-studies by framing the way Italian companies have started to deal with LGBT issues and how this phenomenon relates to its societal embeddedness in such a national and European context (cf. Paauwe & Boselie, 2007). In view of the above, the first objective of the present research is to map out the processes through which companies in Italy end up adopting practices which support the LGBT workforce and, more in detail, to understand what institutional mechanisms influence them, as well as the way in which they do it (cf. Theodorakopoulos & Budhwar, 2015). More broadly, the expectation is to contribute to the study of diversity management in a partly overlooked context such as Italy (cf. Murgia & Poggio, 2014).

From a theoretical standpoint, institutional work represents a challenging field, characterized by the ubiquitous tension between structure and agency and related epistemological debates, the discussion of which goes beyond the scope of this work. However, the analysis of the diffusion of ‘disruptive’ practices, which implementation clashes with deeply rooted beliefs and behaviours, in different institutional contexts can contribute to better understand institutional dynamics and the interrelations between structure and agency. In the case of the present study, if, on the one hand, we are not yet in the position to evaluate the outcome of the institutional change process associated with the adoption of LGBT-friendly practices, on the other hand we still have the opportunity to observe what has initiated it and how it is being carried out (cf. Lawrence, Leca, & Zilber, 2013). Given the relative scarcity (but by no means absence<sup>2</sup>) of institutional pressure for the adoption of such practices, the opportunity is thus to closely observe the agentic effort behind it, performing an analysis of the institutional entrepreneurs who participated in the process that is able to link their characteristics with the institutional field in which they are displayed (cf. Battilana et al., 2009).T

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<sup>2</sup> As reported in the first chapter, the European Union has addressed discrimination based on sexual orientation since early 2000s.

### **3. Research design and methodology**

In the first chapter I outlined the state of the art of LGBT studies and the peculiarities of the Italian context in this respect, highlighting the lack of studies addressing the recent adoption of LGBT-inclusive practices by Italian companies. Therefore, the first purpose of my research was to show (i) *what* is going in Italy with respect to the adoption of LGBT-friendly practices in business organization, that is, to create a first map of the field. Yet, in consideration of my theoretical framework and the high degree of institutionalization of heterosexism in most of Italian organizations, my aim was as well to understand (ii) *why* an organization should embark in the risky and (at least potentially) costly venture of changing the incumbent institutional environment, and (iii) *how* this institutional change process has been started.

The first section of the chapter is thus dedicated to outline my initial research design and method. As I will further explain, I first adopted an explorative approach and set up a multiple case study to answer the ‘what’ and ‘why’ questions; then, my data led me to set up a second round of interviews with the actors who triggered and steered the process of adoption of the LGBT-practices and that can be classified as institutional entrepreneurs. The second section of the chapter provide a more detailed description of my data analysis.

#### **3.1 Design and method**

Given the recent emergence of the phenomenon and the paucity of empirical studies addressing sexual orientation and gender identity in Italian organization, the complexity of themes addressed, as well as the unclear boundaries between the phenomenon and the context, I decided to draw on a qualitative multiple case study (Yin, 2014). According to Schramm (1971), ‘the central tendency among all types of case study, is that it tries to illuminate a decision or a set of decisions:

why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result' (p. 6). I specifically decided to draw on more case studies to increase the validity and generalizability of the findings emerging from diverse empirical evidence and thus providing a larger picture of a complex phenomenon (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007; Stake, 2006).

However, I kept an abductive approach throughout the research process. The term 'abduction' was coined by the American philosopher Charles Sanders Pierce to identify a type of inference that was non-deductive but neither inductive. In Pierce's words, abduction 'is the process of forming and explanatory hypothesis. It is the only logical operation which introduces any new idea' (Pierce, 1903: 216; cit. in Suddaby, 2006). If deduction consists of applying a general rule to a specific case, induction, at the opposite, can be defined as a process of inference which aims at the generation of new theory from observations (Richardson & Kramer, 2006). Abduction situates between the two approaches or, better, can be intended as their combination: the researcher moves between induction and deduction, constantly comparing data and theory and refining his/her data collection and analysis accordingly. In the case of this research work, when the role of actors external to the organizations emerged as critical in the process of adoption of the practices, I revised my data collection to inquire their properties through a second round of interviews.

In the first phase of the research I adopted a purposive sample technique, selecting heterogeneous examples throughout the possible range of cases relevant for the object and the purpose of the research (Patton, 2015). To be sampled, my organizational cases had to meet three main requirements:

- i. To be for profit entities;
- ii. To be Italian or to directly operate in Italy through a registered company;
- iii. To have implemented any kind of policy and/or practice which directly address sexual orientation and/or gender identity, such as same-sex domestic partner benefits, antidiscrimination policies explicitly addressing sexual orientation and/or gender identity, marketing campaigns featuring gay couples or transgender people,

participation to and/or sponsorship of projects and activities for LGBT advocacy, and so on and so forth.

To set up a sample of organizations that have decided to implement LGBT-friendly practices, I drew on a preliminary panel of key actors of the Italian LGBT community who relate to different extents to the Italian corporate world. I came into contact with activists from the larger LGBT Italian association, Arcigay, with the employer association Parks – Liberi e Uguali, with the Lenford Studies Centre (European Studies Centre on sexual orientation and gender identity) and trade unionist belonging to offices specifically dealing with LGBT issues. I also simply ‘googled’ different combinations of the keywords ‘LGBT’, ‘gay’, ‘lesbian’, ‘azienda’, ‘benefit’, ‘congedo matrimoniale’, and came out with several webpages dedicated to companies which had implemented some sort of LG-inclusive policy. Those pages were mainly hosted by local newspaper and LGBT community related websites. This preliminary step allowed me to shortlist a group of organizations and to already acquire some knowledge of the field.

Given the explorative nature of the research, I tried to maximise the width of my perspective relying on different experiences about the adoption of the practices. Thus, I purposively set up a heterogeneous sample of 14 organizations adopting LGBT-friendly practices. The heterogeneity of the sample has been maximised in terms of the following variables:

- **Dimension** (number of employees and revenues). In particular, I sampled 3 medium-sized enterprises ( $50 < n. \text{ of employees} < 250$ ) and 11 big enterprises. This skewness was also due to the fact that diversity management practices are fairly rare in Italian small-medium enterprises (Murgia & Poggio, 2014).
- **Industry**. I avoided as much as possible to sample companies belonging to the same industry. This happens only in two cases and with companies with different country of ownership (Company 5 and Company 11 operating in ICT, and Company 7 and Company 9 operating in banking).

- **Country of ownership.** 9 companies have their headquarters based in Italy, while the rest have theirs based in either other European countries or the US.

The heterogeneity of the sample allowed me to look for differences and commonalities across the sample with respect to the reasons underpinning the adoption of the practices and their process of adoption. It is relevant to notice that all sampled organizations have started the implementation of some LGBT-friendly practices before the enactment of the Law n. 76/2016 regulating civil unions of same-sex couples. A descriptive list of the sampled organizations and of the respective respondents is summarized in table 1.

Once in contact with the organization, I asked to interview the actor who first took the responsibility for the implementation of the LGBT-friendly practices. I mostly started from the HR Head, but in some cases I first met the CEO or other apical actors). At the end of the first interview I chain sampled other actors who intervened in the process of adoption and implementation of the practices within the organization. The respondent sample was usually snowballed among apical actors who sponsored the inclusion of the LGBT workforce, by members of companies' LGBT networks and diversity officers; the composition of the sample thus varied according to the experience of each organization.

In the first phase of my research I was more generally focused on the understanding of the single cases and their settings, rather than on the process of adoption. For this reason I looked at them as 'objects' rather than as 'processes' (cf. Stake, 1995) and I relied on semi-structured interviews (Mason, 2002), composed of four macro sections:

- i. An introductory section about the respondent and his/her organization;
- ii. A second section about the LGBT-friendly practices implemented by the company;

- iii. A third section inquiring the reasons underpinning the process of adoption of the practices, the process itself and the key actors, both internal and external to the organizations, who intervened in the process;
- iv. A fourth section dealt with the Italian context and how it affected the decision to adopt the practices, and how, vice versa, the adoption of LGBT-friendly practices by Italian companies could affect the national context.

Semi-structured interviews allowed me to get more reliable data in terms of comparability between the different case studies. However, in some cases I turned to unstructured interviews (Patton, 2002) privileging the personal experience of the respondent, especially for cases in which his/her role in the organization did not allow to answer precisely to some questions about the practices and the process of adoption or when the respondent self-declared lesbian or gay and was willing to share his own experience of diversity. This happened more frequently with the last turns of respondents, when I had already traced out the process of adoption of the practices and I was more willing to dig out the reasons that underpinned it, as well as the reaction and main ‘feelings’ about the practices themselves. Interviews were carried out mainly at the respondent’s workplace. Whenever possible, I triangulated interview-based insights with Company level documents, such as internal policy documents, corporate social responsibility reports, companies’ ethical codes and pamphlets about diversity and inclusion. I also took part to the ‘GLBT People at Work’ 2016 and 2017 conferences and another meeting held in 2016 in CGIL to discuss the Law on civil unions.

In this first phase, between September 2015 and October 2016 I personally recorded and transcribed 43 interviews for a total of 43h30’ and an average length of about an hour per interview. Two interviews took place at the Faculty of Social and Political Science at the University of Milan, five were phone or Skype calls, while the rest took part at the interviewee’s workplace. In the latter case I had the chance to have many off-the-record chats and in a couple of cases I even had lunch break together with the interviewees.

Drawing on the case studies, I identified two analytically distinct processes of adoption of LGBT-friendly practices by companies in Italy (see the Data Analysis section for a description of the way the processes had been revealed). The first process was a ‘top-down’, business-driven decision of implementing LGBT-friendly policies, characterized by the intervention of a key actor, the employer association Parks – Liberi e Uguali, that spurred and advised the companies on the adoption of the practices and that can be qualified as an institutional entrepreneur. The second process was classified as ‘bottom-up’ since the stimulus for the adoption of the practices came from trade unions. Those unions, and in particular their offices dealing with discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and identity, CGIL Nuovi Diritti and UIL Coordinamento Diritti, also acted as institutional entrepreneurs. As the theme of institutional entrepreneurship emerged, I set up a new round of interviews to further gather data on those actors. The interviews involved some key players of Parks, CGIL Nuovi Diritti and UIL Coordinamento Diritti, together with other actors who operate close to them, such as the LGBT association Arcigay and the lawyers’ association Rete Lanford. The list of respondents of this second phase is summarized in table 2. Between March 2016 and May 2017 I carried out 16 interviews for an average length of about an hour per interview (total recorded 14h53’). In this case all but one interviews were recorded and transcribed. Two interviews took place at the interviewees’ workplace, two were phone calls, one took place at the interviewee’s place, while the rest at the Faculty of Social and Political Science of the University of Milan.

Again, I made use of semi-structured interviews, structured as follows:

- i. A first section focusing on the individual characteristics of the informant, on their professional background and activities related to the LGBT theme;
- ii. A second section about the way they had engaged organizations to include LGBT employees, giving special attention to the accounts and the logics they leveraged to succeed (or fail);
- iii. A third section focusing on whether and how other actors took part in the process.

- iv. The fourth and last part of the interview pointed to the characteristics of the Italian context and to the organizational variables that may influence the adoption of LGBT-friendly practices.



Table 3.1 Sampled organizations' illustrative characteristics and role of the interviewees.

	Industry	Approx. n. of employees in Italy (2015)	Revenues (year)	Headquarters	Interviewees
Company 1	Professional and Technology Services	12,000	\$ 32.9bn (2016)	Ireland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HR Director</li> <li>• HR Manager – Inclusion and Diversity</li> <li>• Human Capital &amp; Diversity Lead, Geographic Services Managing Director</li> <li>• Consulting &amp; Sales Lead Products</li> </ul>
Company 2	Food Processing	8,000	€ 3,3bn (2015)	Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Executive Director Communication and External Relations</li> <li>• General Counsel Americas and Chief Diversity Director</li> <li>• Chief Strategy &amp; Business Portfolio Officer and Global Leadership Team Member</li> <li>• Chief Strategy &amp; Business Portfolio Officer and Global Leadership Team Member</li> </ul>
Company 3	Manufacturing	2,700	€ 741m (2015)	Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HR Director</li> </ul>
Company 4	Healthcare	70	€ 11m (esteemed 2015)	Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CEO</li> </ul>
Company 5	ICT	450	€ 29m (2014)	Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Founding partner, CEO</li> <li>• Founding Partner, Chairman</li> <li>• Founding Partner</li> <li>• HR Director</li> </ul>
Company 6	Cruising	18,000	€ 3,15m (2014)	Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shipboard Development - Diversity &amp; Inclusion Manager</li> <li>• Head of Onboard HR Management &amp; Fleet Services</li> <li>• Sustainability and External Relations Director</li> </ul>
Company 7	Banking	3,400	€ 31,95bn (2014)	Germany	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HR Director</li> <li>• Founder of company LGBT network</li> <li>• Head of Retail Credit Products, president of Diversity Committee</li> <li>• Asset and Wealth Management Director, President of employee LGBT network</li> <li>• Branches Network Director</li> <li>• Business developer for LGBT market segment</li> </ul>

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Industry</i>	<i>Approx. n. of employees in Italy (2015)</i>	<i>Revenues (year)</i>	<i>Headquarters</i>	<i>Participant's position</i>
<i>Company 8</i>	Retail	6,500	€ 29.2bn (2014)	Sweden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• External Relations Officer</li> <li>• Global Diversity &amp; Inclusion Specialist</li> <li>• Store Manager</li> </ul>
<i>Company 9</i>	Banking	64,400	€ 350bn (2015)	Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Industrial Relations Officer</li> </ul>
<i>Company 10</i>	Law Firm	90	£ 1.31bn (2016)	UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Founding Partner</li> </ul>
<i>Company 11</i>	ICT	850	\$ 85.32bn (2016)	USA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HR Director</li> <li>• HR Business Manager</li> <li>• Founder employee LGBT Network</li> </ul>
<i>Company 12</i>	Telecommunications	52,900	€ 21,5bn (2014)	Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diversity Director</li> <li>• North-West HR Officer</li> <li>• Diversity Manager</li> <li>• HR Director</li> <li>• Founder employee LGBT Network 1</li> <li>• Founder employee LGBT Network 2</li> </ul>
<i>Company 13</i>	Logistics	90	€ 34.8m (2015)	Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chairman</li> <li>• HR Director and Legal Counsel</li> <li>• Business Development Manager, member of Diversity Board 1</li> <li>• Business Development Manager, member of Diversity Board 2</li> <li>• Shipping supervisor, member of Diversity Board</li> <li>• Aero-shipping Supervisor, member of Diversity Board</li> <li>• Billing, Control and Documentation Employee</li> </ul>
<i>Company 14</i>	Online Retailing	700	€ 524m (2014)	Italy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Welfare Specialist</li> </ul>

Table 3.2 Second round of interviews

<i>Organization</i>	<i>Form</i>	<i>Interviewees</i>
<i>Parks – Liberi e Uguali</i>	Employer Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Executive Director</li> <li>• Founder, Honorary Chairman</li> <li>• Chair of the Scientific Committee</li> <li>• Chairman</li> </ul>
<i>CGIL</i>	Trade Union	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Founder CGIL Nuovi Diritti Department</li> <li>• Secretary of FIOM CGIL Varese</li> <li>• CGIL Nuovi Diritti Liguria Officer</li> </ul>
<i>UIL</i>	Trade Union	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• UIL Coordinamento Diritti Department Founder, National Officer</li> <li>• UIL Coordinamento Diritti Department, Lombardy Officer</li> <li>• UIL Coordinamento Diritti Department, Tuscany Officer</li> <li>• UIL Coordinamento Diritti Department, Credit and Insurance Sector Officer</li> </ul>
<i>Arcigay</i>	LGBT Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Secretary</li> <li>• Officer for the group Work, Visibility and Coming Out</li> <li>• President of CIG-Arcigay Milan</li> <li>• Former Coordinator and actual fundraiser of Milano Pride</li> </ul>
<i>Rete Lenford</i>	Lawyers Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lenford Studies Centre Officer</li> </ul>

### **3.2 Data analysis**

My data analysis has been performed within the framework of applied thematic analysis as developed by Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2012). Although this method can be compared to Grounded Theory in many respects, it maintains a quite phenomenological approach and mainly concerned with the characterization and organization of lived experiences to apply the results to ‘practical’ research problems of, rather than building theoretical models (cf. Guest et al., 2012; Suddaby, 2006).

During the transcription phase I kept on keeping memos of possible patterns, themes and hypothesis. Before starting the coding process, I wrote down a thick description of each case study to begin to gain control over the data and organize them in light of their relevance for the research questions. Possible patterns for the different processes of adoption of the practices already emerged in this phase of full immersion in the data.

Once collected the first round of interviews, I first performed a structural coding process (Guest et al., 2012), by which I determined a series of categories on the basis of my research question and literature review and filled them for each company. In particular, I relied on my data to identify the policy adopted by each company, the actors who participated in the implementation of the LGBT-friendly practices and the main rationales underlying the company’s decision to undertake a process of inclusion for the LGBT workforce. The results of this passage are summarized in Table 3.3. From here, I conducted a cross-case analysis to identify recurrent themes and/or correspondences among the companies. I clustered the companies with respect to the actors who gave the impetus that originated the process of adoption and find a correspondence with the type of practices implemented. From here, I described a ‘bottom-up’ and a ‘top-down’ process of adoption of LGBT-friendly practices.

At this stage of the analysis, the theme of institutional entrepreneurship (Battilana et al., 2009; Hardy & Maguire, 2008) emerged. Ryan and Bernard (2003) see themes as ‘the conceptual linking of

expressions’ (p. 88). In the case of narratively rich verbatim texts, the authors include in the set of tools for theme-identification the investigation of recurrent similarities and differences across the case studies (Ryan & Bernard, 2003: 102). In all the case studies, one or more interviewees made reference to actors external to the organizations who took part in the process of adoption of the controversial practices under study. In the Appendix (Table A.1) I report a list of ‘exemplar quotations’ that clarify the role played by Parks and Trade Unions in meeting and/or foster companies’ availability to implement LGBT-friendly practices. Anyway, the development of the theme of institutional entrepreneurship was rather ‘etic’, that is theoretically derived (Ryan & Bernard, 2003: 93-94). Given my institutionalist theoretical framework and research questions, the theme of agency in institutional change had left in the background throughout my data collection and analysis.

The new round of interviews was analysed iterating data with the main analytical dimensions of institutional entrepreneurship identified in literature. Specifically, I gave attention:

- i. to their *properties*, intended as the ‘special characteristics, qualities and abilities’ that ‘distinguish institutional entrepreneurs from others in the field, and allow them to envision and promote alternative arrangements’ (Hardy & Maguire, 2008, p. 200);
- ii. To their *social position* (Battilana, et al. 2009; Hardy and Maguire 2008);
- iii. To their intervention strategies, that can be further classified according to (a) the *resources* they mobilize; (b) the *rationales* they leverage for institutional change and (c) the *relations* they rely on to bring about collective action (Hardy & Maguire, 2008).

With respect to the last point (i.e., *relations*), I decided to further investigate the theme of (non) cooperation between actors in the Findings section (par. 4.5). This theme was initially derived by looking at ‘missing data’ (Ryan & Bernard, 2003: 92), that is, asking myself why actors involved in the same activity were never cited within the same organization.

The coding process was helped by the qualitative analysis software ATLAS.ti 6.2.

Table 3.3 LGBT-friendly practices, actors involved and rationales for their adoption

LGBT-friendly practices adopted	Other actors involved in the adoption	Main rationales for the adoption
<b>Company 1</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- LGBT diversity awareness-raising campaign</li> <li>- Training on LGBT diversity</li> <li>- Executive sponsor for LGBT inclusion</li> <li>- Company LGBT and Allies network</li> <li>- Same-sex partner benefits</li> <li>- Parks membership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Global Headquarters</li> <li>- Parks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Business Case:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Employer branding</li> <li>&gt; Diversity and Innovation</li> <li>&gt; Inclusion and Performance</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Internal and External Corporate Social Responsibility<sup>3</sup> (CSR)</li> </ul>
<b>Company 2</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- LGBT diversity awareness-raising campaign</li> <li>- Training on LGBT diversity</li> <li>- Diversity Board with LGBT representative</li> <li>- Company LGBT and Allies network</li> <li>- Informal extension of partner benefits to same-sex couples</li> <li>- Parks membership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parks</li> <li>- 'LGBT Movement'</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Business Case:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; 'Pink-washing' after a boycott</li> <li>&gt; Employer branding</li> <li>&gt; Mirroring of the customer base</li> <li>&gt; Inclusion and Performance</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Internal CSR</li> </ul>
<b>Company 3</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Extension of the marriage leave to same-sex couples married abroad</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Trade Union</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Non-Discrimination</li> </ul>
<b>Company 4</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Training on LGBT diversity</li> <li>- Parks membership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Business case:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Employer branding</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Company 5</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parks membership (founder member)</li> <li>- Informal extension of partner benefits to same-sex couples</li> <li>- Participation to Pride parade</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Internal CSR</li> <li>- Business Case:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Networking with other members of Parks (as potential customers)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<sup>3</sup> By Internal CSR I intend employer's focus on internal rather than external stakeholders (i.e., employees rather than society at large).

LGBT-friendly practices adopted	Other actors involved in the adoption	Main rationales for the adoption
<b>Company 6</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- LGBT diversity awareness-raising campaign</li> <li>- Informal extension of partner benefits to same-sex couples</li> <li>- Parks membership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parent company</li> <li>- Parks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Internal CSR</li> <li>- Business Case: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Mirroring of the customer base</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Company 7</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- LGBT diversity awareness-raising campaign</li> <li>- Training on LGBT diversity</li> <li>- Executive sponsor for LGBT inclusion</li> <li>- Same-sex partner benefits</li> <li>- Company LGBT and Allies network</li> <li>- Informal extension of the marriage leave to same-sex couples</li> <li>- Internal development of products specifically designed for same-sex couples</li> <li>- Parks membership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Global Headquarters</li> <li>- Parks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Internal CSR</li> <li>- Business Case: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Employer branding</li> <li>&gt; Mirroring of the customer base</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Company 8</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- LGBT diversity awareness-raising campaign</li> <li>- Same-sex partner benefits (including marriage leave)</li> <li>- Advertising campaign featuring same-sex couple</li> <li>- Parks membership (founding member)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Global Headquarters</li> <li>- Parks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Internal and External CSR</li> <li>- Business Case: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Employer branding</li> <li>&gt; Mirroring of the customer base</li> <li>&gt; Inclusion and Performance</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Company 9</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Extension of the marriage leave to same-sex couples married abroad</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Trade Union</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Non-Discrimination</li> </ul>
<b>Company 10</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parks membership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Internal CSR</li> </ul>

	LGBT-friendly practices adopted	Other actors involved in the adoption	Main rationales for the adoption
<b>Company 11</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- LGBT diversity awareness-raising campaign</li> <li>- Training on LGBT diversity</li> <li>- Same-sex partner benefits (including marriage leave)</li> <li>- Company LGBT network</li> <li>- Participation to Pride parade</li> <li>- Parks membership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Global Headquarters</li> <li>- Parks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Business Case: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Employer branding</li> <li>&gt; Diversity and Innovation</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Company 12</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- LGBT diversity awareness-raising campaign</li> <li>- Training on LGBT diversity</li> <li>- Same-sex partner benefits (including marriage leave)</li> <li>- Company LGBT network</li> <li>- Parks membership (founding member)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Business Case: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Diversity and Innovation</li> <li>&gt; Inclusion and Productivity</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Internal CSR</li> </ul>
<b>Company 13</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Same-sex partner benefits (including marriage leave)</li> <li>- Training on LGBT diversity</li> <li>- Parks membership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Internal and External CSR</li> </ul>
<b>Company 14</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Training on LGBT diversity</li> <li>- Company LGBT network</li> <li>- Informal extension of partner benefits to same-sex couples</li> <li>- Parks membership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Parks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Internal CSR</li> </ul>



## **4. Findings**

The creation of a LG(BT)-inclusive workplace environment in Italian organizations can be framed as a divergent institutional change process (Battilana, et al. 2009), as it clashes with elements deeply rooted in the Italian institutional order, the clearest example being the marriage institution. I draw on the notion of institutional entrepreneurship to explain how two actors, with sufficient resources and interest (DiMaggio, 1988), have triggered and engaged in the implementation of LG(BT)-friendly practices in the Italian organizational context.

In the first section of the chapter I briefly describe the top-down, management-driven process whereby most of the organizations in my sample have adopted practices supportive of gay and lesbian employees. Likewise, in the second section I map out the bottom-up process initiated by trade unionists that characterises the adoption of LG-inclusive practices in two of the case studies.

Given the determinant role played by the employer association Parks – Liberi e Uguali in the case of the top-down process, and by trade unions with respect to the bottom-up, I dedicate the third and fourth sections to sort out the characteristics of these institutional entrepreneurship according to the main analytical dimensions of institutional entrepreneurship, as identified by Hardy and Maguire (2008).

Finally, I discuss the relations occurring between Parks – Liberi e Uguali and trade unions, highlighting the potential conflicts and complementarities occurring between these actors and their different approaches.

### **4.1 The top-down process of adoption of LG-friendly practices**

The first process of adoption of LG-friendly practices by companies in the Italian context can be referred as a top-down process driven by apical actors in the organization, spurred and/or assisted

by the employer association Parks – Liberi e Uguali. This process develops over a vertical, hierarchical line as the decision to adopt the practices originate on the autonomous willingness of the top management to create a more inclusive organization for lesbian and gay employee. Thus, the process is characterized by the formal commitment of the top management and the unilateral definition of the practices by the HR (or Diversity, where present) department.

The first characteristic of the process is that it origins in the organization as a strategic choice of apical actors to gain competitive advantage through diversity management actions explicitly oriented toward the LG(BT) workforce. The first impulse for change may be ‘exogenous’<sup>4</sup>, taking the form of a recommendation of adoption from a parent company that has already implemented diversity management in other countries: ‘we’ve received more and more pressure from our global departments, to address the LGBT theme,’ says the Human Capital and Diversity Lead of Company 1. Exogenous shocks may also take the form of a market crisis due to the boycott of the LGBT community, as in the case of Company 2, after its chairman said he would never feature a same-sex couple in an advertisement.

[...] the process definitely got very accelerated...when our chairman made some statements during a radio interview, and we used that situation as an opportunity to really put a lot of effort, a lot of resources behind our idea of having a more diverse and inclusive organization. So, it was definitely a catalyst to change and it, also because of his comments word about LGBT, we definitely keep a very close look, we monitor very closely our progress on LGBT inclusion. (Company 2, Chief Diversity Officer).

However, the drivers for the adoption of LG-inclusive practices may be ‘endogenous’ as well, like the presence of apical actors in the organization who see a competitive advantage deriving from an inclusive approach toward the LGBT community.

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<sup>4</sup> By ‘exogenous’ I mean external to the unit of analysis which, in this case, is the Italian organizational context.

We've begun to take care of it [diversity management] in 2009, when the HR Director from then founded the People Caring department. Because, when he put me in charge, the HR Director told me: 'I'm tired of seeing people belonging always to the same ethnicity, with the same, let's say, mindset. I want diversity to become a way of being of people, because it entails more innovation, creativity, ideas, strategy, etcetera'. We have to acknowledge that we are, and we were and will be again a Company in solidarity for economic crisis reasons, and we don't have for many, and we'll continue sadly, to not hire or to hardly hire. So, as I say, we have somehow, with the salad we have, even if vegetables are a bit stale, we have to try to prepare the best salad we can. (Company 1, Director of 'People Caring' Department)

In the top-down case, organizations rely on a market logic (Thornton et al. 2012) or, as Raeburn (2004) theorizes it, on an 'ideology of profit' to rationalizes the adoption of LGBT-friendly practices as good for the bottom line. When asked to unfold the rationales that make LGBT-inclusion a business case for the organizations, our respondents relied on a heterogeneous set of reasons, resonating with those identified by the literature. The enhancement of individual variables, such as job satisfaction and subjective well-being, have often been indicated as a good reason of adoption, as they in turn lead to higher employees' performances. In some cases, respondents openly identifying as homosexual confirmed the positive relation between an inclusive work environment and their performances:

Me, as a worker who doesn't have to make effort, in addition to work, to be coherent with his own lie, I'm better. Before [the coming out] I had to remember what bullshits I had said, what I had told, be coherent with my story, that is a primary source of stress. People don't think about it, but a heterosexual person, who doesn't need this kind of tricks, cannot realize it. But coherence with a lie, especially when it involves many other people, requires a bit of attention and forcefully draws you energy, because of the total amount of energy you can dedicate, that you have at your disposal in a day, a part goes to perpetuate your lie. Having

people here who can feel free to be what they fundamentally are, makes them more peaceful. And a more peaceful worker is a more productive worker, someone who builds links, a team player, who relates better to clients. Now, I've never made studies about it, but I think it's self-evident, at least on me. (Company 13, Business Developer Manager)

As well, recruiting and retention in the so called 'war for talent' (cf. Day & Greene, 2008) have often been cited as major reasons, since LGBT-friendly practices help to attract and retain the best talent among the LGBT population.

Diversity for us is not for fashion, it's an element that belongs to our DNA by now. But it belongs to our DNA also because, quite frankly, we could not make anything different, because it would imply to limit our potential to attract the best talents. Because if we attract only talents who are white, Anglo-Saxon and protestant, or who are solely heterosexual, we would limit ourselves not only in the capacity to have, and so to recruit the best young graduates from universities, but also in the capacity to understand the diverse sensibilities that can be found on the market, and therefore we somehow have this kind of need. (Company 1, HR Director).

Another reason concerns innovation. LGBT workers are seen as carriers of specific differences, as such they contribute to increase the degree of heterogeneity of the workplace, enhancing innovation. When asked about the reasons for the inclusion of the LGBT workforce, Microsoft Italy HR Director says:

Reasons, as I was telling you, are basically two. The first: to ensure that diversity within the organization is enhanced, enriched and producing value, assuming that, as I was telling you, that diversity entails innovation, innovation entails growth. Therefore, there's a business case. To have, with respect to a product, an approach, a strategy, a diversity of opinions, a diversity of approaches, that in turn coalesce and can bring even richer solutions, even more effective. This is value for the organization. (Company 11, HR Director)

Finally, some companies have decided to target the Italian LGBT market share. To do that, some companies have communicated their gay-friendliness promoting their products with advertisement showing homosexual couples. To measure up the expectations of the LGBT market though, the presence of LGBT individual in the organization seems functional to the mirroring of the target market.

There's a mirroring action. If you get around shops you see gay couples, so why shouldn't I tell their story? I mean, marketing knows that if we assume the usual percentage 10% of gay population on the national or general population, probably in Company 8, as our employees told us, that the percentage in Company 8 seems around 18%, it's obvious that as Company 8 you have a power of attraction of certain categories of people. It holds for co-workers, it holds for clients as well. You cannot pretend you are not interested in the 18% of your public, or you cannot anyway pretend to not talk with the 18% of your public. (Company 8, Chief Communication Officer)

As the business case is based on an economic costs-benefits ratio, I also asked my respondents for the costs associated to the implementation of the practices. Financial costs were quantified as irrelevant, especially in large companies. When asked about potential backlash from conservative stakeholders, none of the respondents considered it as a serious threat for business in Italy.

Yet, given the unavoidable ethical implication of the issue at stake, in most of the interviews the market logic got blended with ethical rationales (cf. Raeburn, 2004). Indeed, many respondents considered the adoption of LG(BT)-friendly practices as something at the border of, or partially overlapping with, corporate social responsibility (CSR), whose effects may extend beyond the organizational boundaries.

We often say: 'We do it because is the right thing to do and because it's good for business'. Because we don't wanna forget that from ethical and corporate social responsibility

standpoint, this is the right thing to do as well. But it's also good for business, so it's a great situation where the right thing to do also helps the business. (Company 2, Chief Diversity Officer)

Another characteristic of the process is the unilateral imposition of formalized policies by the organization with scarce involvement of trade unions, which are asked to endorse the new policy rather than participate in its design.

They [unions] were taken aback when we inserted the items [the same-sex domestic partner benefit]. And we explained that for us it was not something negotiable, it's not like I give...I mean, in the sense of the Italian union, because it's a different sense that North-European unions. European unions, it's the win-win company, you build it up, you sit around a table, everyone contributes...you build the company up as common good and so on and so forth. The South-European culture is: negotiation table, the barricade, the ownership, Confindustria, Federdistribuzione now, and so on and so forth. Then it's not a matter of negotiation, it's not like a make you a concession and concede you the extension because you, the union, ask me: no. It's something that I, as a company, consider myself to be even late on. (Company 8, Chief Communication Officer)

In the top-down process, the intention of the organization is to establish inclusive environments, especially in those workplaces where the mere ignorance about LGBT themes may lead to discrimination. This goal is mainly pursued through formalized anti-discrimination policies explicitly addressing sexual orientation and diversity, and through mandatory training programs for the management and possibly the HR personnel. More interestingly, the initiative comes from the side of the organization even with respect to those practices that directly affect the life of LGBT employees, such as the extension of domestic partner benefits to same-sex couples or the foundation of company's LGBT-networks. This is a striking difference with the American case, where the first instances of such practices have derived from the activism of gay and lesbian communities (Creed & Scully, 2000;

Creed et al., 2002; Raeburn, 2004). In other words, in Italy it is the organization itself that autonomously decides to concede domestic partner benefits to same-sex couples and strongly encourages, if not directly recruits, its lesbian and gay employee to set up a network. This is the case of an American employee of a German multinational bank, who used to be member of the LGBT network in the New York and London based branches of the company, and who, by virtue of this 'experience', was asked to help in setting up the Italian network.

[...] my partner was here, then I decided to come back to Italy and, probably in the first three months, they asked me: 'M., can you come here at the HR? because we want to set up a group of the company's LGBT network in Italy'.

The 12 companies of my sample involved in this process belong to the employers' association Parks – Liberi e Uguali. The association with Parks has come almost immediately after the decision of each company to address sexual orientation and gender identity diversity, the reason being the complete absence of know-how in this specific area and, more in general, the already mentioned scarce diffusion of diversity management in Italy (Murgia & Poggio, 2014). Indeed, Parks has participated in, and shaped the implementation of all the above-mentioned practices, operating as an importer from the American and British corporate field. Indeed, after its establishment in 2010, Parks – Liberi e Uguali has become the point of reference for diversity management and, independently of company-specific reasons for the adoption of LG-supportive practices, has continuously played an active role in increasing the number of its members, recruiting new companies through its enlarging professional network, especially in the HR field.

#### **4.2 The bottom-up process of adoption of LG-friendly practices**

In parallel with to the top-down, management driven process, I define another analytically distinct process, characterised by a bottom-up stream of initiative, as the adoption of LG-friendly practices originates from the stimulus of trade unionists and employees and get bargained with the

organization often within advisory commission, such as welfare and equal opportunities commissions (Commissioni Paritetiche per le Pari Opportunità), giving birth to formal union agreements. In this case, LGBT-friendly initiatives do not emerge as a strategy of the top management to gain competitive advantage but as a request from gay and lesbian employees. The bottom-up process is underpinned by rationales of non-discrimination and social justice rather than on a market logic and do not entail a coherent strategy. Therefore, the outcome in terms of practices is not as thorough as it may be in the top-down process, and it is basically limited to concise agreements on the extension of rights already recognised to heterosexual married couples, namely domestic partner benefits or leaves (e.g. the ‘marriage leave’, or ‘congedo matrimoniale’ in Italian).

Two of the case studies fall into the bottom-up process and present attributes deserving analytical attention as they show complementarities with those of the top-down process.

In one case (Company 9), the extension of the marriage leave to same-sex couples derives from the requests of a gay employee who married abroad with his partner. The request was initially denied by the company as non-compliant with company policy, since same-sex marriage was not recognised by Italian law. Thus, the union took the chance to propose a new deal extending the provision of the national collective agreement for the marriage leave also to homosexuals couples that have married abroad. The agreement was discussed within the welfare committee of the company, a body composed by representatives of both the company and trade unions, that gathers to discuss about specific themes. As They are not to be intended as ‘negotiating table, but rather [as] brainstorming occasions’ (UIL Coordinamento Diritti, Tuscany Officer).

[...] we use the committee a lot. Let’s say that everything, wherever there’s the possibility, we don’t want to put ourselves in opposition, because when you go to a negotiation table, willy-nilly, you already start with two positions that are conflicting anyway. Instead, when we want to try to approach things in a non-conflicting way and try to analyse them



because maybe we don't know them, neither us, the company, nor the unions, we do, we held these meetings of the welfare committee [...] (Company 9, Industrial Relations Officer)

In the second case (Company 3), a manufacturing company, the extension of the marriage leave to same-sex couples was requested directly by the union without there being any request coming from the workforce. The request was formulated within the equal opportunities commission and led to the first agreement on LGBT issues in the metal-mechanic sector in Italy.

If the question is: 'How many cases are there in the company? Who pushed you to do this thing?' No, I personally don't know [of any case of LGBT employee pushing for the extension of marriage leave to same-sex couples]. [...] It's born from the activity of the equal opportunities commission. This is correctness, I mean, the correct answer. [...] In unions' language as 'bottom need' we mean a group of workers who came to us to say: 'Help us, we have a problem.' [...] It's not born like that. It's born at a level of negotiation where, within the commission, there are also other issues, I was making you the examples of medical reasons, study etc. where at some point we've tried to tackle this issue, and within the commission itself we immediately found, even with a certain surprise if you want, from our side, an immediate openness from company's side. (Fiom CGIL Varese Secretary)

Unions' initiative to extend marriage leave rely on the will to assert workers' rights, independently of their sexual orientation. As unions represent worker's rights, the rationale is that of equal rights and social justice, that is non-discrimination of LGBT individuals as workers and citizens (cf. Raeburn, 2004). The setting of the agreements, that is equal opportunities commission, is per se both a cause and a result of such a framing. On the side of the corporate, the intention is to send a message of non-discrimination rather than strategically include, and promote the inclusion of, the LGBT community.

This agreement, beyond guaranteeing rights, vehicles a fundamental cultural message inside the company, then I also wanted the adherence of workers' representatives, right? And that I wasn't a top-down policy but a real message of cultural evolution. Especially in an industrial context, metal-mechanic, that usually has an opposite dimension. They also asked me a question, to complete my answer, asking: 'How many requests have you had?' And I answered: 'If the issue has been put on the table by trade unions it means that this need has emerged from workers.' Then, if from one, three, or six...I don't know. But this isn't the point. It's that by reaching this kind of agreement and introducing a new right of this kind in the integration contract, we send an important message of organizational culture oriented toward non-discrimination. If this agreement leads to the fact that some rights are recognized and that they are exploited by who has an interest, all right. But what, from a managerial perspective, I somewhat care about more is that the message passes to the workers, to all stakeholders, that the management has an attitude of openness and non-discrimination. (HR Director, Company 3)

Inevitably, also the bottom-up take place in a profit-oriented corporate context, thus the ethical logic must blend with the demand of the bottom-line. Both unionist and representatives of the firms agree on the positive impact of non-discrimination policies on the business, but with less emphasis than the actors involved in the top-down process. Again, instead of extolling the virtues of diversity management, the aim is to ensure equal opportunities to all employees.

In the case of the [marriage] leave, the legal department said: 'No,' and then we found ourselves to analyse the case with trade unions precisely because it wasn't company's intention to create disparity of treatment [...] we are dealing with diversity more from an equal opportunities standpoint rather than an institutionalization...because in the company we actually realize that possibilities for discrimination are countless, even if you don't want to [...] the risk of institutionalization is that you look only for pieces of activities, while [...] the

search we always run is to balance the need of the company on the one hand, because if the company doesn't have an interest it does nothing, and the needs of colleagues and families on the other, [...] if people can work better and happier, there's a productivity increase, then the company has a return. Thus, we're trying to understand what people ask us to figure out where to find a trade-off, indeed, to seek it and to exploit it because it's an advantage even for us. (Company 9, Industrial Relations Officer)

This approach appears to be limited to the removal of objective barriers to equal opportunities, and does not aim at the direct involvement of the LGBT community, neither inside nor outside the company.

#### **4.3 Parks as institutional entrepreneur**

**Properties.** Parks – Liberi e Uguali has been founded by a homosexual former HR, who worked in the banking industry for more than 20 years, cumulating a long international experience mostly in London and Moscow. He set about the association by gathering 7 LGBT- friendly companies. After three years, operational responsibility of the association passed to the executive director, who is a homosexual with a solid professional background in the international banking industry as well. Since its foundation in 2010, Parks has experienced a continuous increase of the number of its members, from 7 to 34 (2016), and a growing media attention and coverage.

Initially, Parks could be considered a highly risky venture, as its founder described it: 'It's been very difficult at first. It's been...look, it's been very difficult. It really required an incredible faith'. Indeed, before the advent of Parks, not only diversity management in Italy was underdeveloped in general but completely overlooking the sexual orientation and identity dimensions (cf. Murgia & Poggio, 2014). When asked if anybody else was somehow dealing with diversity of sexual orientation and gender identity in Italy at the time he decided to set up the association, Parks' founder said: 'No,

but not even with diversity [in general]. When I got back to Italy and I started to talk, for instance, with human resources associations, with my colleagues, like that, and I said: «We deal with diversity...» they looked at me with a weirded-out face.' (Parks Founder).

Another important property of Parks, which distinguishes it from other similar workplace LGBT organizations, is its founder choice to set it up as an employer association and not as an independent organization. This has been strategically relevant as it allowed the organization not only to count on membership fees, but also on the brand of member organizations, that by associating do not became mere allies of LGBT inclusion, but actual advocates. That being important especially with reference to high-status organizations.

I wanted them to belong. I wanted them to come and pay. I wanted their...what I think is Park's real added value, it's that they're members of Parks. That is, their brand is part of Parks' asset. They aren't clients, they're members. That requires...I mean, I wanted to say out loud: 'Look that this stuff here, GE, Microsoft, Deutsche Bank, Citibank, Costa Crociere, Telecom Italia, Banca d'Italia...is a Parks' member.' (Parks Founder)

**Position.** The international experience of Parks' founder and executive director in the banking field allowed them, on the one hand, to disembed from the heteronormative Italian organizational context and to come out in their workplaces, as well as to get in touch with diversity management and workplace LGBT equality organization such as *Out & Equal* in the US and *Stonewall* in UK, whose concept they translated and transposed to the Italian context (cf. Boxenbaum, 2006; Boxenbaum & Battilana, 2005); on the other hand, their previous brilliant career paths have provided them with the legitimacy and the rhetorical repertoire to interact successfully with managers on a pure business ground. In other terms, their business man identity enabled them to fully exploit and promote a business case logic for LGBT inclusion in the workplace, thereby attracting new members to the association.

This is a feature, a diversity of Parks, very useful in my opinion. That is the reason why, if I talk with an entrepreneur or a CEO, I've got something to say because I speak his own language, because me and him we're talking about the same thing, we're talking about business. I don't wanna talk about Cirinnà [the civil unions Law] because I don't wanna get out of my field. I'm talking of business. Does Cirinnà talk about business? No? Then I don't care. (Parks' Scientific Committee President)

Noteworthy, many of our respondents spontaneously underlined the professional competence of Parks' directors and the successfulness of their training seminars. Thanks to their social capital and skills, they could gather into an employer association many high-status organizations, most of them operating in knowledge-based sector and characterized by a multinational structure, relying on a direct dialogue with the top management.

**Resource mobilization.** The first resource mobilized by Parks is the diversity management expertise of its executive director, who provides associated companies' management with training programs and best practices consulting. Moreover, Parks operates as a certification agency, as the membership to the association automatically grants the organization the LGBT-friendly company status. The issue of its annual LGBT Diversity Index, a benchmark tool to measure the comprehensiveness of companies' LGBT-friendly policies, enhances the value of this resource. As Déjean, Gond and Leca (2004) argue, measuring helps to legitimize a new activity and invest the measurer with power, as it establishes a reward and punishment mechanisms. Indeed, best scorers in the LGBT Diversity Index get awarded each year during a business forum organized by Parks and may gain notable media attention. Finally, Parks can be considered as a gate to a collaborative network of LGBT-friendly companies, whereby members share accumulated experience and best practices, especially valuable in a normative context as lacunose on LGBT issues as the Italian one. The

association operates as a bridge by connecting people from different companies and setting up diversity management related events<sup>5</sup>.

I think the expertise, the know-how and the professionalism of people working in Parks had contributed to make companies understand that associate with Parks is a process...so companies saw the association Parks as a great opportunity either to begin a process of inclusion or to accelerate what they have already done, with the help of a team of professionals who are a depository of the different experiences from companies that have already gone through the process. (Parks Executive Director)

**Rationales.** Even if concerned with an intrinsically ethical issue, that is the freedom of LGBT people to live their feelings openly and free from discrimination, Parks' frame for the adoption of LGBT-friendly practices hinges unconditionally on a market based logic. By doing so, the business case for diversity allows Parks to legitimate its action based on organization's self-interest (cf. Suchman, 1995). The exploitation of the business case for LGBT-inclusion is framed as a 'win-win' situation, where organization can raise profits while doing the right thing, that is giving recognition to the LGBT community and dismantling heterosexism.

*Parks'* actors share the conviction that companies are powerful change agents, even more critical in a national context characterized by political stasis on the theme of sexual orientation and by highly fragmented and politicised LGBT associations. Coherently with this approach, Parks formally avoid any political stance in order to protect the interest of its members.

[...] we never take a stance because our members don't want to have a political colour, off course. In my opinion, the word of [LGBT] associations has never seen, wrongly,

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<sup>5</sup> This point could also fit in the **position** and/or **relations** dimensions, but I consider the creation of an actual network as a resource. However, all the dimensions are interrelated to some extent and must be read together.

the workplace, the work environment and the working organization as a social change agent, something that it is instead. There've been a lot of blindness on that, on the side of the word of associations. That's it, very simply. Paradoxically, companies have been much more changing agent than politics. It's sufficient to remember *Company 8's* commercial with the two guys hand in hand, 6 years ago to date, I mean, it's incredible that a company somehow take charge of a political message, something that should obviously done by somebody else. (Parks President).

**Relations.** At the end of 2016, among *Parks'* members 10 provide professional services (4 consulting firms and 6 law firms), 6 belong to the financial sector, 5 to the IT sector, and 3 to the pharmaceutical sector. Among the others, only 2 are manufacturers. Interestingly, apart from business organizations *Parks* includes among its member the Italian Association of Personnel Directors (AIDP), the most prominent Italian association of HR managers. This membership has been strategically relevant since it has brought the theme of LGBT organizational inclusion into the HR community that, as already mentioned, was as yet totally unaware of the topic. Another relevant addition to the association has been that of Banca d'Italia, which decided to join the association after the promulgation of the Law n. 76/2016 regulating same-sex civil unions. During our interviews with *Parks* and its members another association had often been mentioned, namely the Association of Parents of Homosexuals (AGEDO). AGEDO has often been involved in training courses for *Parks'* members and some of our respondents underlined the emotional charge of such meetings. *Parks* provides speakers at international summits organized by the LGBT associations *Out & Equal* in the US, and *Stonewall* in the UK. It is a part of a working group set up in 2012 by the National Office Against Racial Discrimination (UNAR) to combat discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation or gender identity, together with a large group of other Italian LGBT associations. It also maintains relations with universities and business schools, giving lectures on diversity management. Finally, during its annual LGBT Business Forum, in addition to representatives of the just mentioned

organizations, Parks invites speakers from the business press, foreign embassies, and other representative from the LGBT community.

#### **4.4 Trade union confederations' LGBT-rights departments as institutional entrepreneurs**

**Properties.** Two Italian trade union confederations have established departments explicitly addressing LGBT rights in the workplace. In early 1990s the CGIL Nuovi Diritti ('CGIL New Rights') Department has been established within the CGIL union, with the explicit purpose of contrasting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and identity in the workplace, but also of creating awareness on these themes within the union itself (cf. Greene & Kirton, 2009). It is organized into regional offices to which discriminated LGBT workers may resort.

There was an initial, promotional phase, then public initiatives to make acknowledge that in the union, beginning from CGIL, this cell has born, to use an old word, dealing with that [LGBT rights]. Then my surprise was that when I asked the union to deal with those issues I was thinking in terms of outside counselling. I realized that we actually needed inside counselling as well [...] this, I must admit, is still valid, I mean, still today my function, one of my principal function, is to be an intermediary between, say, the worker expressing these needs and the delegate that maybe isn't comfortable with certain arguments or has some difficulties in approaching them, not because of prejudice itself, but because, being a remote theme, he maybe fears to approach it with an inadequate vocabulary... (Founder of CGIL Nuovi Diritti).

It is not directly involved in the bargaining of collective agreement with companies and acts as a counsellor for single cases of discrimination. Nevertheless, it has had the merit of putting the theme of LGBT rights in the union's agenda. Notwithstanding any agreement has yet been reached at



the national level, some results have been obtained at the second-level of negotiation by initiative of industry representatives.

In 2013 the UIL Coordinamento Diritti (UIL ‘Rights Coordination’) Department has been established with the aim of integrating the equal opportunities office, focusing on discriminations related to sexual orientation and identity. The department has a headquarter and a network of representatives organized for region and professional categories. Although recently founded and mainly focused on counselling of discriminated LGBT workers through its trade unions, since the foundation of Coordinamento Diritti, UIL unions have reached agreements with the Italian largest banking group and with a company in the hospital services sectors. Also in this case, the department’s strategy has been to put the theme of LGBT rights on the union’s agenda and, as in the case of CGIL Nuovi Diritti, to provide its representatives with the competences necessary to deal with LGBT issues.

The fact that there’s a Coordinamento Diritti internally, or a CGIL Nuovi Diritti in CGIL, in my opinion it’s useful to train activists, managers, militants. It happened few years ago [...] within the UIL family, a hospital in the public sector, but again, in my opinion because they didn’t think to it, they did it mindlessly, they did this leaflet that was then defined as homophobic, right? Using a classic joke, like...you know. Well, I didn’t like it obviously, and people who share with me a certain kind of story didn’t like it either. And then, since I’ve always been a militant, an activist inside and outside the union, I said: “I don’t like this thing.” [...] and finally, a mechanism started to say: ‘there’s something wrong here. We have to work on training as well, in this case, right?’ [...] understanding that also companies were clearly heading toward extensions [of benefits], towards, ‘IKEA factor’ rather than...and so on, American companies. Given that I see that companies were clearly ahead of the union, something like that it’s unbearable. Then I said: ‘here we need a 360° review.’ Both from an internal standpoint, to train our managers, and from an actual political standpoint. (UIL Coordinamento Diritti, National Officer)

Union officers dealing with LGBT rights showed particular sensitivity and commitment to and with LGBT issues, as in the case of a CGIL officer who told us about the strength of belief necessary to approach the issue in Italy in the 1990s, as ‘today it can seem normal that we’ve a meeting in the union about this topic, but 40 years ago, 30 years ago, it was a taboo in every environment. Not only in the union, but also in the workplace, in society at large’.

A common trait of officers of union departments dealing with sexual orientation and identity discrimination is political activism, often in associations dealing with discriminated LGBT individuals. This variable is considered when recruiting new officers, as it certifies their experience in dealing with concrete LGBT issues. ‘Before recruiting the person, you have to try to understand a little bit where he/she comes from. If he/she comes from the associations word for instance. For example, it was very important to me, we got many like that, that come from associations,’ says UIL Coordinamento Diritti National Officer.

**Position.** Unions department dealing with sexual orientation and gender identity can count on the capillary diffusion of confederated unions in different territories and economic sectors. That was evident in one of our cases, wherein the union request for the extension of marriage leave to same-sex couples came from the instance of a gay employee working in a little branch of the company, far away from the headquarters both geographically and hierarchically. Moreover, unions LGBT-rights department have a strong presence ‘on the field’: the institution of local offices coupled with the parallel experience of many of their members in local LGBT associations, allows LGBT workers to easily getting in touch with them.

**Resource mobilization.** Indeed, the main role of unions department dealing with sexual orientation and identity is to provide LGBT workers with counselling and support in the individual negotiations with the organization in case of discrimination. Our respondents described unions’ mediation style as cooperative, and described legal action against the Company as a last resort solution. Indeed, no cases of legal action or prolonged conflict were reported to us.

In general, the strong bond occurring between unions and LGBT activism – in particular with Arcigay – often due to the very background of LGBT-right departments' officers, provides them with a wide knowledge of, and a long experience with LGBT issues – both inside and outside the workplace.

**Rationales.** The rationales that underpin the promotion of LGBT-inclusive practices of union departments concerned with LGBT rights do not leverage on the creation of economic value for the organization but point to the defence and guarantee of workers' rights. Instead of considering LGBT workers as carriers of peculiar values for the organization, unions identify LGBT workers as workers *as such*, thus carrying the same set of rights pertaining to all workers. In this framework, non-discrimination is the goal and it must be achieved by formal agreements extending to sexual minorities the same rights already acquired by heterosexual workers'. Yet, unions respondents recognize that agreements may be not sufficient per se, since they do not address informal discrimination (cf. Chung, 2001), and a heterosexist environment may even prevent LGBT worker from asking for a benefit if the cost of coming out is perceived as higher than the benefit itself. Thus, cultural change is seen as a prerequisite to the exploitation of formal rights, and education plays an essential role in this respect: 'Today the real challenge is more cultural, it is to tear down prejudice through information, that is something that goes further than strict contractual claim, which is useful and appropriate as well,' says one of the founders of CGIL Nuovi Diritti Department.

When asked about the appropriateness of a business case for diversity in order to promote LGBT-inclusive practices, all but one of our unions' respondents agreed on its functionality for LGBT inclusion, allowing for its complementarity with their approach for a wider social scope.

It's not a problem to me, because if we go to analyse well all these things, that perhaps come from very different conditions, we realize that they're a proof of prejudice decreasing, because, I say it again, one of defining elements of prejudice is total refusal of confrontation on the topic [...] get closer to the topic from different perspectives, off course according to your necessities. If I'm a company that sells, I need to sell stuff, it's obvious I'll do it giving

priority to sales, right? It's kind of saying that part of a company's profits gets invested in a campaign that has a social purpose. Perhaps it implicitly does it for marketing reasons, but those funds are useful to the cause since they in turn allow other processes to happen. (Founder of CGIL Nuovi Diritti Department)

The one rejecting the business case for diversity warned us against the dangerous implication of submitting the inclusion of a minority group to profit increase. Referring to a famous Italian advertising campaign targeting homosexual couples, he ironically commented:

What I'd like to pass you is this message: non-discrimination is either at 360° or it's nothing. It's like being pregnant: you're either pregnant or not pregnant. You cannot be a little bit pregnant. If you tell me you're inclusive, but only in that sector, you're inclusive only with those who are tall, blonde, graduated with blue eyes that don't bother you, well... (UIL Coordinamento Diritti Department, Lombardy Officer)

**Relations.** Through unions' archival material summarizing agreements related to LGBT rights, we noticed how the companies that reached LGBT-related agreements with trade unions mainly belong to labour-intensive sectors, where labour is more fungible than in knowledge-based sectors. We found cases of companies operating in the logistic sector, in the metal-mechanic sector, a consumer cooperative in large-scale retail, a company operating in hospital services and one providing call-centre services. Therefore, unions' initiative seems to be more essential in those sectors where workers' contractual power is lower due to their higher fungibility.

The relational dimension of unions LGBT rights departments somehow reflects the fragmented reality of Italian LGBT associative world, as our respondents reported of different collaborations with local actors. CGIL Nuovi Diritti belongs to the working group of UNAR while UIL Coordinamento Diritti was born after the creation of the group. Notably, both CGIL Nuovi Diritti and UIL Coordinamento Diritti have always had a consolidated relation with the most important Italian LGBT association, Arcigay:

We've relations, links with unions, so it's not like we directly file the labour lawsuit. But, if there're episodes of discrimination we turn either to CGIL or to UIL that are the two union we collaborate the most with, that in turn have their own departments dedicated to this kind of instances, we kind of built them together over time. (Arcigay, National Secretary)

#### **4.5 Relations between Parks and trade unions**

Institutional entrepreneurship implies a high degree of relationality. Its success heavily depends on identity construction and consensus and not surprisingly social movement theory can be very helpful in the analysis of institutional entrepreneurs' effort to establish a divergent change.

In the Italian case, we observed how the adoption of LG-inclusive practices in the workplace has been pushed and driven from different standpoints by the employers' association Parks and trade unions' LGBT-rights departments, and how both have intertwined relations with different actors. More broadly, their different reference groups – workers on one side and employers on the other – and skills, as well as the sectors in which they are more likely to operate, call for potential complementarity, as acknowledge by many of our respondents from both sides.

The union is always opposed to the employer, that's it, it's normal. It's like that, it's always been in life. Negotiations between unions and employers are hard, there's a *do ut des*...very well, then I'm happy when I see a union has got to promote the inclusion issue in a company. I'm very happy because we as Parks cannot cover everyone, then the more parties are around doing the same things...here we work for the well-being of society. (Parks Executive Director)

They're complementary, sure. Then, considering that we all have a goal that is to enhance on the one hand the visibility and on the other the acceptance [of LGBT issues]. Needless to say that everything that's done with this aim is something positive, regardless; then there can't be prejudice if someone, say, that we dislike, or we don't deem very nice anyway, does it. Then: 'no.' It would be short-sighted. (CGIL Nuovi Diritti Officer)

Yet, notwithstanding Parks and unions participate to the same process and recognize a wider social scope in their activities and many of our respondents refer to each other as 'good friends', no evidence of collaboration between these actors emerge from our data: 'No, we don't have, I mean, relations with Parks, I mean we know who they are, sometimes we talk with them but we don't have any activity, say, any relation concerning common service or political activity' says the Arcigay National Secretary. As another instance of this non-cooperation, neither Arcigay nor unions take part to Parks annual LGBT business forum.

On its side, Parks represents the employer and by its own nature must preserve a top-down process of inclusion whose control is hold by the management. The underlining rationale is to leverage companies power to advocate LGBT rights, and that is the most effective way to do it.

It's obvious that Parks has the same goal [of unions and LGBT associations]. But I think that between setting up an association by which you tell how awful, how bad the word is e how awful discrimination is and son on and so forth, and saying: 'Now I set up, I roll up my sleeves, and I take capitalism of the whole world, their money, their power, their influence, and I put them at the service of this cause.' Is it less noble? It is more effective, to me. I've no problem in saying that in my opinion what Parks has done it's worth hundreds of time what [associations and unions have done]. (Parks Founder)

On their side, some unionists claimed recognition for their longstanding militant activity, highlighting the marginal contribution companies have brought in fighting historically deeply rooted prejudice against homosexuality in Italy. In other terms, they contest Parks implicit priority to defend

employers' interests rather than LGBT people's. Moreover, unionist reported instances of 'allergy to labour relations' (UIL Coordinamento Diritti, Lombardy Regional Officer), which prevents unions to fruitfully cooperate with organizations on LGBT themes.

As a union I can tell that if you show up in a company, just to make a proposal of a certain plan, or program, or idea, right? They indeed immediately say: 'But,' they look at you with circumspection, right? Because they immediately think: 'is there something going on here? Is there any problem?' and so on and so forth. (UIL Coordinamento Diritti, National Officer)

Beside the tension deriving from the structural distributive conflict between employers and employees, unions LGBT-right departments must handle the problem that they represent people who are both employees and LGBT and whose rights can be hardly disentangled. In other terms, their rationale hinging on workers' rights prevent them to penetrate companies' headquarters successfully, being their claims all together unacceptable from the companies' management side.

I bring you the example of the X Company, because it's another important example: it is like cursing to talk about unions there. I'd like to check if this overflowing tolerance and inclusion will be there if someone raises the hand and says: 'I'm a trade union leader.' 'Oh, really? Oh shit, for real?' There...I mean: '...and, as a trade union leader, I'd like safety, I'd like respect from colleagues, I'd like respect for that one, who doesn't have a door for handicapped, I'd like respect for that one, who has to go on maternity leave, but they keep her here in the evening regardless...' 'Ah, then it gets, but, um...man, does this guy want this stuff for real?'

Parks and trade unions LGBT-rights departments characteristics as institutional entrepreneurs are summarized in table 4.1.

*Table 4.1 Parks and Unions characteristics as institutional entrepreneurs*

	PARKS	UNIONS LGBT-RIGHTS DEPARTMENTS
PROPERTIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strength of belief in LGBT equality</li> <li>• Professional background in the international banking sector</li> <li>• HR and Diversity management skills</li> <li>• Form: employer organization, avoidance of political dimension</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strength of belief in LGBT equality</li> <li>• Political and associational background</li> <li>• Form: trade union department.</li> </ul>
POSITION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disembeddedness from the Italian context: International exposure to LGBT diversity and inclusion practices and organizations</li> <li>• Embeddedness in international HR and Diversity Management networks</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Capillary diffusion in different regions</li> <li>• ‘On the field’ presence</li> </ul>
INTERVENTION STRATEGIES		
RESOURCE MOBILIZATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diversity management consulting</li> <li>• Certification power</li> <li>• Benchmark index</li> <li>• Establishment of an LGBT-friendly companies network</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual counselling to discriminated employees and support in the individual negotiation with the organization</li> <li>• Longstanding experience with LGBT issues</li> </ul>
RATIONALES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business case approach: Enhancement of organizational performances through the inclusion of LGBT workforce.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Equal opportunities approach: Extension of social rights to all workers</li> </ul>
RELATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong presence in knowledge-based sectors</li> <li>• HR Professional Association (AIDP)</li> <li>• AGEDO</li> <li>• UNAR</li> <li>• Business schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong presence in labour intensive industries and service sectors</li> <li>• Arcigay</li> </ul>



## **5. Discussion**

Based on an exploratory multiple case study across 14 Italian business organizations, my research focuses on how two institutional entrepreneurs, the employer association Parks – Liberi e Uguali and trade unions' LGBT-rights departments, got engaged in overcoming heterosexism in Italian organizational settings. Although both actors see this process as a step of a wider societal change aiming at the removal of prejudice against LGBT people, they present peculiar characteristics and rely on different strategies to accomplish their work. Thus, in the first section of this chapter I discuss these differences and account for them in terms of legitimacy within the Italian industrial relations system. In the second section, I integrate the chapter with some recommendations for practitioners who may engage in a process of inclusion of the LGBT-population in Italian organizations.

### **5.1 Two types of institutional entrepreneurs**

The employer association Parks – Liberi e Uguali and trade unions' LGBT-rights departments are born with the common aim of creating more inclusive workplaces for LGBT employees. However, their activities build on different rationales: Parks top-down approach puts an emphasis on the business case for diversity, while unions' LGBT rights departments draw on equality and social rights logics. This difference seems to indicate towards the more general, long-standing debate on managing diversity between equality and business case scholars (cf. van Dijk, van Engen, & Paauwe, 2012). The first brought evidence of the benefits of diversity management on organizational, team and individual level variables, such as Company performance, creativity and job satisfaction (cf. Özbilgin, Tatli, Ipek, & Sameer, 2016). The latter argue that diversity management being exclusively based on a business case perspective is not effective in guaranteeing sufficient

empowerment to disadvantaged minorities (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2015), and that ‘individualistic, meritocratic discourses of diversity reinforce, rather than challenge, the existing status quo; installing managers in a privileged position with the power to decide which elements of diversity are, and are not, welcome’ (Schwabensland & Tomlinson, 2015, p. 1916). Indeed, this kind of critical concern was expressed by one participant, a unionist and activist with a longstanding background in the fight of LG(BT) discrimination in the workplace, who warned me against the threat of submitting minorities rights to a business logic, this risk being higher when concerned only with a specific dimension of diversity and not considering its multiple and intertwined dimensions. As van Dijk, van Engen and Paauwe (2012) put it, ‘the contingent nature of the business case perspective can easily turn into an argument against diversity the moment diversity appears to have a negative impact on organizational performance’ (p. 75).

The empirical findings of this work bring evidence that Parks and unions’ LGBT rights departments share the same end, namely overcoming or, at least, reducing the discrimination and marginalization of LGBT people in organizations. However, they have developed different intervention strategies to involve, and coordinate the actions of, their reference stakeholders: employers on the one side and workers on the other. Even though the arena is limited to the production system, in both cases the ambition is also to have an impact on the wider social context, bringing about a cultural change using organizational actors as institutional change carriers. From this perspective, the top-down and the bottom-up processes seem complementary to each other, since addressing different organizational stakeholders as well as different economic sectors by sharing at the same target. Moreover, even though the institutional entrepreneurs associated with the two processes pursue change by leveraging different institutional logics, namely the business case and the ethical one, what I documented is a prevalent mutual acceptance of the other side logic, if not an open support. In other words, in view of a common societal goal, actors pragmatically accept the possibility to pursue it through different paths, and do not worry or speculate about the possible drawbacks associated with the other side rationale. Those findings are somewhat in line with the frame blending activity

employed by many American LG activists in their accounts to promote anti-discrimination policies in their companies and gather new allies, as described by Creed and Scully (2000), Creed, Scully and Austin (2002) and Raeburn (2004). With respect to the UK private sector, Colgan (2011) comes to similar findings, identifying the link occurring between a corporate social responsibility approach and a business case approach to sexual orientation diversity management.

However, in all these instances the deconstruction of the arguments in favour of the inclusion of gay and lesbian people was based on the precondition that all the actors involved in the fight for LG equality were, if not in the same team, on the same side, and that the strategic exploitation of different logics should not compromise this front and, on the contrary, should widen the group of potential advocates. Not surprisingly, the framework adopted for the study of the adoption of LGBT-friendly policies in the US has been that of social movement theory (Creed & Scully, 2000; Raeburn, 2004; Schneiberg & Lounsbury, 2008; Seo & Creed, 2002).

In the Italian case, the complementarity of activity and logics, as well as their non-mutual exclusivity of the employer association Parks and trade unions, as well as their mutual acquaintance (Parks' executive director and some unions respondents referred to each other as 'good friends'), what has to be explained is the complete absence of cooperation and coordination between them.

The first important consideration concerns the so far scarce interest for the business world of Italian LGBT associations, if not for cases of discrimination. Associations have considered LGBT rights as something to be conquered on a political stage, while the potential of business organizations as institutional change agents has been, at least partially, overlooked. Thus, the lack of a powerful actor external to the business world able to coordinate and mediate between employers and trade unions may be taken as a partial explanation for this lack of cooperation. Secondly, looking closer at the characteristics of Parks on the one side and unions' LGBT rights department on the other, it can be useful to take a step back to Fligstein's (1997) definition of institutional entrepreneurs as actors 'who have social skills, that is, the ability to motivate cooperation of other actors by providing them with common meaning and identities' (p. 397). To provide common meaning and identities,

institutional entrepreneurs must rely on logics already accepted by their stakeholders, as well as on a set of properties, which make possible the sharing of a collective identity. Even if advocating for the rights of a well-defined minority, namely the LGBT community, both Parks and unions' LGBT rights offices derives their legitimacy by formally serving the interests of employers and workers, respectively. According to Suchman (1995) legitimacy may be defined as 'a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions' (p. 574). In our case this 'system of norms, values, beliefs and definitions' is determined by companies in the case of Parks and by the union at large for LGBT-rights departments. In other words, the source of their legitimacy does not derive from the LGBT community itself but from the side they represent in the employment relationship. That structural opposition prevents both sides from openly cooperating with each other, since that can compromise their identity and, in turn, imply a loss of legitimacy.

The institutional logics approach (Thornton et al., 2012) may be an appropriate theoretical framework for the interpretation of this phenomenon, by highlighting how institutions both enable and constrain social action. In this case, we see how Parks and trade unions' LGBT-rights departments take advantage of a European HRM model to legitimate themselves with the respective constituencies, loosing at the same time the chance to cooperate for the sake of the LGBT community. The employer association Parks takes advantage of high-profile business organizations to legitimate its message of LGBT-inclusion through the implementation of comprehensive set of inclusive practices in a growing number of companies; this strategy has made effective by the professional background of its founder and executive director and by the utilitarian rationale they hinge on. However, the action of Parks is pretty limited to the service sectors and there is no proof that the conditions of LGBT employees of the associated companies have got better, especially in their lower hierarchies and peripheral branches. Moreover, the formal avoidance of any political stance, prevents Parks from taking side in highly debated issues, such as that relating to the then approved law on same-sex civil unions. On the other side, trade unions' LGBT-rights departments' approach based on social justice is coherent with the

identity and skills of their members, and legitimate them as a point of reference for LGBT workers, especially in those sectors where labour conflict may be harsher and/or where unionization rate is high (i.e. the banking sector). At the same time, their position on ‘the other side of the barricade’ often preclude them a constructive dialogue with top managers and limit their action to the adoption of single policies, such as the extension of marriage leave to same-sex couples.

The study of the parallel effort of two actors aiming at the same institutional change but displaying different types of institutional work (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2011) may contribute to institutional theory in different ways. First, the present work shows how more subtle forms of contestation over meaning and identity may arise even between actors who push for the same institutional change. In this respect, institutional entrepreneurship may be more suitable than social movement theory for the analysis of incipient phenomena of institutional change, especially in institutionally controversial contexts, like Italy, where different actors may aspire to steer change in directions favourable to their subjective position within the institutional field. While social movements research highlights the role of collective action motivated by structural inequalities (Lawrence, 2008), a closer focus on the traits, strategies and positions of individual actors can help to generate more punctual explanation for contexts where social identity is more fragmented. This is the case of Italy, where the LGBT movement has not been politically cohesive, nor able to develop a coherent strategy with respect to the world of work.

Secondly, a more comprehensive analysis of institutional entrepreneurs, taking into account their characteristics as well as those of the field and the broader institutional context in which they are embedded, may help to reduce the controversy among institutionalists related to some heroic, muscular views of institutional entrepreneurs (Battilana et al., 2009). Although Parks and trade unions’ actors share similar motivations and political vocation, as well as entrepreneurial spirit, their personal traits and positions in the institutional field have deeply influenced their intervention strategies, providing them with opportunities but also constrains in terms of cooperation.

## 5.2 Implications for practitioners

Sexual orientation and gender identity have been considered as relevant dimensions of diversity only recently in Italy, and most of practitioners still lack a basic knowledge of the topic, having focused almost exclusively on gender diversity so far. The most likely mistake is to forget the invisibility of such dimensions: in many cases HR managers are unaware of the presence of LGBT employee or underestimate their number. Very common is also the conviction that, since no one complains, there is not discrimination towards LGBT employee. It must be noticed that in Italy, since the promulgation of the Legislative Decree n. 216/2003 on equal treatment in employment and occupation, only one court judgement<sup>6</sup> had considered discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation (*Rete Lenford v. Taormina*, 2014) and, furthermore, the applicant was not a discriminated worker, but the lawyers' association *Rete Lenford*. Yet, discrimination towards LGBT employees is rather common in Italian workplaces (see Ch. 1.5 in this volume). Therefore, HR and diversity practitioners should start from the assumption that their organization are likely to belong to this group and that this makes coming out quite problematic for their LGBT employee.

Italian practitioners can turn to two different types of institutional entrepreneurs for getting started with activities aiming at the inclusion of sexual minorities. Each of them presents specific characteristics, and the associated pros and cons. Parks has a probably unique set of skills in diversity management, and provides the organization with a platform of other companies with which sharing past experiences and expertise. This may be particularly relevant in a context where the legislative framework concerning same-sex unions is changing and, more in general, LGBT topics are still obscure to most people. Moreover, Parks knows how to involve the top-management, which contribution is crucial, not only in terms of power and resources devoted to diversity management

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<sup>6</sup> *Rete Lenford v. Taormina*, Tribunale, Bergamo, sez. lavoro, sentence 06/08/2014.

initiatives. Indeed, many participants reported the importance of having executive sponsors for LGBT-friendly activities, since their example represent the first source of credibility for the business case for diversity. Yet, a merely top-down imposition of inclusive practices may be ineffective or, worse, detrimental. Especially in large companies, inclusive messages coming from the headquarters may not reach the employees at the bottom levels of the organizational hierarchy, or labelled as ‘just another organizational fashion’, or even being perceived as merely instrumental rather than a concrete commitment for inclusion. In the worst-case scenario, the top-down imposition of practices that may interfere with institutional areas traditionally kept outside the workplace, such as religion and family, may be perceived as violent and intrusive, and thus trigger a backlash and enhance discrimination. Furthermore, even the most comprehensive set of diversity practices do not guarantee for the inclusion of LGBT employees, most notably in those organizational branches or plants where the educational level is lower and culture more homophobic, for instance those in the South and in the islands. Trade unions’ LGBT-rights departments can certainly be more effective in this respect, given their geographical and sectorial diffusion and their role of advocates of workers’ instances, as well as many of their members’ background as activists in LGBT associations. Practitioners should bear this considerations in mind when deciding which kind of external expertise their organization may need to tackle discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity. The industry in which the company operates, its business model and level of internalization, the demographic composition of the workforce and the unionization rate are among the variables that can make one choice more appropriate than the other.

Nevertheless, the seeming conflict of interest between Parks and trade unions is not necessarily related to different assumptions about the ideal shape of adequate diversity management initiatives. My research shows how these institutional entrepreneurs share the same goal, namely the dismantling of heterosexism within and outside the workplace and, de facto, do not disagree on the substance of any LGBT-supportive practice. Considering the complementarity of their approaches, Italian organizations may probably benefit of their joint endeavour, but the conflicting nature of the

relation between employers and unions within the Italian industrial relations system undermines forms of collaborations. Although practitioner must be aware that the impetus for collaboration is unlikely to come either from the one side of the barricade or the other, ground for cooperation could eventually be set by the single organization.

Whatever the solution chosen by the company, an important final remark concerns the necessity to monitor with the due care the climate for inclusion of LGBT employee over time. My data say that more than probably only one company in Italy has surveyed its own organizational climate for LGBT people, after it realized that the exploitation by lesbian and gay employee of same-sex partner benefits was suspiciously low. Although the survey did not depict a particularly alarming landscape (and the Company was already globally known for its gay-friendliness), evidence suggests that more or less subtle forms of discriminations persist inside and outside the organization and hinder the coming out process of many LGBT employees. Monitoring the workplace climate for LGBT employee by means of interviews and surveys, such as Liddle, Luzzo, Hauenstein, and Schuck's (2004) LGBT Climate Inventory, is thus highly recommended not only to practitioners who wish to address sexual orientation and gender identity diversity from zero, but also to those who have already implemented some practices in their organizations but still do not know their actual efficacy.



## 6. Conclusion

In this work I have explored the phenomenon of adoption of LGBT-friendly practices by companies in Italy from a neo-institutionalist standpoint. I tried to explain how and why an organization would challenge the extant institutional setting in a context that did not seem to put any pressure for that to happen. By means of a multiple case study I have researched a sample of organizations that underwent the institutional change process associated with the dismantling of heterosexism, which revealed to be triggered by two external actors, with sufficient resources and interest to be classified as institutional entrepreneurs (DiMaggio, 1988).

I identified two distinct processes of adoption of LGBT-friendly practices in Italy, a top-down process led top managers, and a bottom-up process initiated by workers and trade unions. Those processes have been triggered by two institutional entrepreneurs, namely the employer association Parks – Liberi e Uguali, with respect to the top-down process, and two trade unions' LGBT-rights departments, namely CGIL Nuovi Diritti and UIL Coordinamento Diritti, with respect to the bottom-up process. These two cases exemplify two types of institutional entrepreneurs representing the two main perspectives for legitimizing diversity management, namely the one claiming a moral value being inherent to this management approach, and the one focusing on its potential economic value. Parks' characteristics have been particularly coherent to the deployment of a strategy based on a business case logic, linking the inclusion of the LGBT workforce to enhanced organizational performances. In parallel, Unions' LGBT rights departments characteristics have resulted suitable to the adoption of LGBT-friendly practices based on an ethical logic for a just treatment of all employees, independently of their sexual orientation. Although the two processes share the same goal (i.e. the disruption of heterosexism in the workplace) and present potential complementarities, I observed a substantial absence of cooperation between those institutional entrepreneurs. I explained this lack of coordination in terms of different reference stakeholders and derived legitimacy: the two processes

and their respective institutional entrepreneurs must conform their rationales and related narratives to an antagonistic relationship between employer and unions, peculiar of the Italian industrial relations system, to secure the legitimacy they need to carry institutional work. Openly cooperating with each other would indeed endanger both their legitimacy, as this can be interpreted as having taken over also a bit of the respective other perspective.

I dedicate the first section of this chapter to briefly point out some corollaries of my study of LGBT issues in Italian organizations; then, in the second section, I lay out the limitations of the present work, as well as possible avenues for future research.

## **6.1 Final remarks**

As recently noticed by Thomas Köllen (2016),

By using the term LGBTI many organizations purport to explicitly consider intersexuality and trans-identities as part of their diversity management activities. LGBTI, then, is often defined as the name of the target group for organizational initiatives that focus on the dimensions of ‘sexual orientation/identity’ and ‘gender identity’: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex persons. However, a closer examination of the concrete actions that are implemented on this issue by most organizations reveals that the target group in most cases is reduced to lesbian, gay, and (partially) bisexual employees. (Köllen, 2016, p. 1)

This is very much the case of Italy, too. In the section of my interviews focusing on the policies implemented by the organization under study, I had a specific question on transgender employees and possibly related policies. Only in the case of a legal Company (Company 10) I have been told extensively about a transsexual employee who has been working in the organization for 7 years and who have contributed to the fall of many prejudices among her colleagues. However, the Company was not adopting any kind of specific policy concerning transgender employees, and had hired her though a program thought for the reintegration into the labour market of troubled people (e.g.

candidates with a criminal record). In 2 cases (Company 8, Company 12), the organizations have dealt with the transition process of transgender employees, and despite the support the company provided them with, no formal policy addressing transgender employees was under way. In other few big organizations (Company 1, Company 2, Company 9, Company 11), participants informed me of the presence of some transsexual worker, but were not able to provide me with further details. In general, transgender issues are managed in a ‘case by case’ fashion by the Italian diversity management community, despite the increasing attention the gender identity dimension is receiving overseas and the availability of specific organizational practices. For these reasons, the employer association Parks – Liberi e Uguali is gradually pushing its members to consider transgender issues in a more structured way, dedicating a section of its benchmark index ‘LGBT Diversity Index’ to transgender-inclusive initiatives and benefits, and hosting transgender speakers during its annual business forum ‘LGBT People at Work’.

The theme of intersexuality remained completely excluded from consideration during my interviews, both by myself and the participants, even though some explicitly refer to intersex people in their diversity statement by means of the acronym LGBTI (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex). Indeed, traditional approaches of diversity management to sexual minorities do not seem capable of dealing with intersexuality given, on the one hand, the traditional binary conception of gender, whereby ‘diversity management then equals either the direct, and one-sided, support and promotion of women; or the attempt to create framework conditions that offer the same opportunities to both men and women’ (Köllen, 2016, p. 9), and, on the other hand, their tendency to lump together the dimensions of sex, gender identity and sexual orientation, which reflects quite different conditions. To sum up, the effort to include sexual minorities in Italian workplaces seems to be almost exclusively focused on lesbian and gay employees, whereas there is a lack of organizational effort in implementing policies appositely design to meet the needs of minorities such as transgender, transsexual and intersex employees.

Although this study does neither allow to measure the real efficacy of Parks and unions to bring about actual change, nor to assess the exact extent of their action, my data suggest that it is Parks who has established itself as the reference consultant and certifier for LGBT-friendliness of business organizations in Italy. The pure business case, ‘politics-free’ approach may theoretically entail to sacrifice several facets of the LGBT cause on the altar of profit, but the growing number of associates is a good proxy for their success. At the opposite, unions and associations seemed to have ‘lost the train’, in the words of Arcigay Milan President, who used the metaphor of a backpack full of political meanings to describe the inability of Arcigay to become the first desirable partner for companies. This metaphor is also evocative of the association slowness, due to its size, its internal political dynamics and its involvement in a myriad of different projects, at different level. This image contrasts with the lean structure of Parks, which allowed it to swiftly intercept companies’ need for diversity management expertise. Indeed, the internal fragmentation of the Italian LGBT movement has not allowed the biggest LGBT association to develop an action plan for the diffusion of an inclusive message throughout the Italian corporate world. Notwithstanding the attempt of some members in the early 2000s to bring to the table the issue of diversity management, internal political fragmentation has derailed the project. At present, Arcigay collaborates with some public administrations but is completely absent from the corporate world.

Companies devolve a definite amount of budget to diversity management activities, which is usually not very consistent. In the case of Parks associates, a great amount of this budget is spent in the membership fee and the rest, when present, is more or less implicitly managed by the association itself. Therefore, it is difficult for associations to get access to money which ideally should be spent for the same activities they work for, but that, in fact, is invested in diversity management and other corporate activities, rather than in projects meant for the LGBT community at large. This dynamic has led in the past to somehow paradoxical situations, like that of the Milano Pride parade, in which the organisers of the event (namely Arcigay Milan) were struggling to finance the parade and the events connected to it, whilst several companies were marching with Parks without sponsoring the parade.

For their part, trade unions' LGBT-rights departments do not seem to have the resources to sponsor any kind of project. This situation has fostered a certain tension between Parks and some members of Arcigay and Italian LGBT associations in general. On the one hand, associations accuse Parks to be a for profit entity which do not care for the good of the LGBT community; on the other hand, Parks reserves the right to protect the interests of its members and support the kind of activities it deems more appropriate. In any case, Parks holds the symbolic power to certificate which companies are 'LGBT-friendly' and benefits from its status, whilst associations do not have a direct dialogue with companies, so that those organizations potentially interested in LGBT-supportive practices resort to Parks. Moreover, the most likely companies to support the activities of LGBT associations are already Parks' members, so that Arcigay must interface with Parks for fundraising.

Although one participant from Arcigay thought of the association as a link between Parks and trade unions, given its natural role of container of the different expressions of the Italian LGBT movement, some factors make this scenario implausible. First, Arcigay and other Italian LGBT associations have overlooked the world of work, not considering companies as vectors of institutional change and keeping their battles within other institutional fields (namely the political arena); indeed, Arcigay turns to trade unions' LGBT-rights department when it must deal with workplace issues. Secondly, and because of the previous point, Arcigay and other associations may look too 'politically compromised' and therefore uncomfortable partners from companies' perspective.

In conclusion, diversity management of sexual minorities in Italy is still at an incipient stage. Besides the abovementioned partial consideration of some sexual minorities, the implementation of supportive policies is rarely followed up by a monitoring of their efficacy, leaving the doubt that some companies can be only interested in promoting themselves as 'LGBT-friendly' to please potential customers and the public opinion, and being perceived as progressive and innovative. However, this phenomenon (sometimes referred as 'pinkwashing') opens a debate about its consequences, which are hardly predictable. Like in the case of companies that promote themselves as environmentally friendly without being really sustainable (so called 'greenwashing'), the flaunt of a socially relevant theme

such as the discrimination of sexual minorities can be positive per se, independently of the effectiveness of the policies adopted. At the same time, the risk is to accommodate and consider the problem of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity as settled, boosting a vicious circle of hypocrisy, whereby organizational actors repeat void scripts pretending to be inclusive to accommodate company's proclaimed value of diversity. Moreover, excessive emphasis on the LGBT-friendliness, especially by major multinational companies, may encourage the perception of sexual minorities as privileged categories, which is not the case. The widespread use of the unspecified term 'gay lobby' in the Italian public debate can be seen as a symptom of this perception. In this scenario, the two institutional entrepreneurs object of this study, the employer association Parks – Liberi e Uguali, and the trade unions' departments CGIL Nuovi Diritti and UIL Coordinamento Diritti, will likely play a central role in the definition of the way Italian companies will interpret diversity management and the inclusion of sexual minorities in the workplace.

## **6.2 Limitations and future research**

My methodology and sampling entail some limitations. In building the multiple case study my effort was to maximise the heterogeneity of the sample in order to get a wider perspective of the field and enhance the generalizability of my results; nevertheless, the selection has been biased by the availability of organizations to collaborate and it was not systematic with respect to the structural characteristics of the sampled organizations (e.g. size or sector). Moreover, I was not able, a priori, to build a more balanced sample with respect to the two processes identified, and my selection has revealed quite skewed toward the bottom-up process.

As the research was moving forward, the almost complete absence of conflict reported by the participants when asked about the process of adoption of LGBT-friendly practices increasingly surprised me. This made me consider the possibility that conflict may have been more likely to arise in branches of the organization further from the headquarter, a space that we have not explored and

that could have yielded different narratives. As noticed in previous chapters, attitudes toward homosexuality vary a lot when considering different regions of Italy, with significantly higher levels of intolerance in southern regions and the islands.

Finally, it must be acknowledged that the main contribution of this piece of research is to describe an emerging phenomenon, rather than develop fresh theory. This is not a minor shortcoming, as clear theoretical contribution should be the aim of any research project, and this study is no exception. Yet, some consideration must be considered before casting aside the findings presented above. First, this research project was explorative in nature. Almost no previous literature was available on the topic with respect to the Italian context, as very scarce it was relating to other European countries. That, coupled with my limited research (in)experience and amount of time at disposal, made me opt for a less speculative approach to the extant theory. Indeed, I went for a large multiple case study that, on the one hand, strengthen the robustness of my findings but, on the other hand, made it difficult to explore more in detail specific aspects of the phenomenon, whether related to its diffusion or to the actors involved. Follow-up interviews or, simply, a longer and repeated immersion into the data, would have helped in developing a more refined theoretical contribution. Unfortunately, nothing but time can help to remedy these huge limitations.

In the light of the above, I still argue that at this very preliminary stage of organizational LGBT studies in Italy, a well-organized account of the process of diffusion of the phenomenon and of its protagonists, supported by rich data, was a priority, for me and for those scholars who may be interested by this research topic.

Both future qualitative and quantitative studies would help to map the extent and shape and the diffusion of LGBT-friendly practices in different countries. The impact of organizational variables such as size, industry and country of origin may reveal some significant trend. Moreover, quantitative assessment of different processes of adoption of LGBT-friendly practices and their relationship with organizational variables could yield valuable insights on their effectiveness and degree of complementarity. Looking at wider institutional variables, it will be interesting to observe whether the

ratification of law addressing LGBT issues, such as the recent Law 76/2016 regulating same-sex civil unions in Italy, will contribute to more organizational attention to the theme, or companies will simply abide to the requirements of the Law, without engaging in major processes of cultural change. It may be also worthwhile for future research looking at the perspectives of LGBT workers across different industries, job and mansions, to develop a more nuanced understanding of the facets of discrimination (or inclusion) in different organizational settings, also in terms of intersection between sexual orientation and gender identity and other dimensions of diversity. These findings could suggest the most appropriate types of support for LGBT workers, accordingly.



## Appendix

Table A.1. 'Exemplar quotations' on Parks and Trade Unions

Quotations	
<b>Company 1</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Parks is, and continues to be, a partnership of great value. I've to say, I. helped me a lot and continues to help me, S. too, in this process, right? Also because confrontation is important to us to, it's important to study, it's important to understand before defining an action, a strategy, an initiative. (Company 1, HR manager - Diversity and Inclusion).</li> <li>● [...] we've involved our CEO, too, we introduced I. to him, we explained him...Thus, in my opinion, we raised awareness thanks to Parks, which helped us a lot.</li> </ul> <p>Q: What did Parks tell you to help you, to raise awareness? What's their contribution? Beyond the fact that they're more or less good...What does an advisor give you?</p> <p>R: Because they explained well, they succeeded in explaining well, what unconscious bias means, what distress means [...] and then I got a feedback from people: "I didn't think of it, actually." So they do well, in my view, in transmitting what other people's distress is. Because, me too, as I said the first time, when this guy came to talk to me, I said: "Well, what's your problem? You're not discriminated, are you?" Then I realized that the problem wasn't that... But if you don't address the problem, you don't get it. And Parks is very good, in my view, to make you understand what inclusion means, to not feel distress, the unconscious bias that...they're good in that, in creating awareness. (Company 1, Human Capital &amp; Diversity Lead).</p>
<b>Company 2</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● In Italy we have a very strong partnership, we're a member and we have a very strong partnership with Parks. in the US we have a very strong partnership with the Tyler Clementi Foundations, with GLAD, and with the Human Rights Campaign. (Company 2, Chief Diversity Officer - General Counsel for the American Region)</li> <li>● So, for example in Italy, our colleagues from Parks, they've been toured office many times, we hosted one of the Parks' board meetings. when we had diversity and inclusion update to the employees in Parma, one representative from Parks came and he also spoke at the town hall. we had a D&amp;I inclusion date, sorry a D&amp;I day, in Parma last September. and as part of our D&amp;I open, we call it "open day", "open house", one of the sessions was about LGBT inclusion, and Parks helped lead that conversations. (Chief Diversity Officer - General Counsel for the American Region)</li> </ul>
<b>Company 3</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Well, the union put in the list of the platform themes the proposal for non-discrimination of unmarried couples, to extend the same rights. Then it was raised, the theme was raised by representative trade unions.</li> <li>● See Par. 4.2 for other quotes.</li> </ul>
<b>Company 4</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● [...] today we're a small company, to my knowledge we've never discriminated anybody for being LGBT, but, obviously, gradually, as we grow my knowledge gets less and less able to make such a statement fact based. Thus, at some point I contacted I. with the idea of preparing this company to what's to come. [...] all sources of talent must come to this company without meeting any barrier. Forms of talent that are separated for reasons that have nothing to do with the capability to work here. And that was the initial push. At that point I contacted I., we met, we joined Parks and at that point he and a colleague of him came to present to my team, in an hour and a half meeting, the themes about what it means to be, grossly, a gay-friendly workplace, or otherwise open to diversity. There was a little bit of discussion, and so on and so forth... (Company 4, CEO)</li> </ul>

- The thing I've learned is to put myself in an LGBT person's shoes. Something that, so far, I had always read from a heterosexual perspective, who even consider himself totally open and free. But I had never put myself in the shoes of...and see the world with these eyes. And the relationship with Parks and with the people that in this moment spend their working lives dealing with that, made me think. (Company 4, CEO)

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#### Company 5

- I. didn't come immediately, but it was a colleague of ours who, being homosexual, naturally, met I. more frequently, e then they made us this proposal to meet I. e to talk about this association and then we obviously said: 'You're welcome,' and we've been among the founder members of the association. Because it seemed an interesting initiative. (Company 5, CEO)

- (Parks) was little at the time. And a colleague of ours who evidently had discovered it, came to talk about it and we decided that it was worth to investigate the matter. Given that it was an employer association, given the aim, etc, it looked just the right place where to put ourselves. precisely to give a little more of a formal structure to a dimension of diversity that we knew in the company, we had it, but probably we didn't manage in the proper way. No, 'not in the proper way' is incorrect; we didn't give it the right visibility. it's more correct to say that. (Company 5, HR Head)

- Q: Are you happy with your membership in Parks? Are you unhappy? About what?  
R: Well, I'd say...yes. Happy, we're happy. Results are hardly measurable. Well, I can report an example on my skin. We have posters of Parks membership right in the hall. Very visible. And it happened of some applicants at the interview who might ask some questions, and that's much more...hit me more directly, a person from the union with whom we hadn't begin to collaborate yet, and thus there was a kind of reciprocal diffidence, well, not diffidence, but: 'Don't know! How's the other? How's he not? What shall we say? How formal should we be?' and so on and so forth. Instead, we get started on the very right foot. Because he saw that poster. When we went to the coffee machine, to break the ice, the way you do when you get to know someone, he began to talk about his partner e what they did or not didn't and I went along just talking about what came to my mind in that moment...and we build a priceless trust relationship. [...] These are the things which make a difference. It's hard to measure. (Company 5, HR Head)

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#### Company 6

- We approached the theme of diversity approximately two years and a half ago, almost three years ago. let's say two years and a half ago. Initially thanks to the foresight of a person who oversaw the Company 6 Campus e with the team of advisors we have he proved to be particularly aware of the theme. So, we began, if not to act, to open our eyes e to therefore to look what was happening around, on the market, and we realized that associations like Parks or Valore D existed. Then the first associations with these entities began, almost in a clandestine way, to understand how the others were moving. I say 'almost in a clandestine way' because, say, the approval from the HR management to be a member of these associations as a company was not asked for, it was a thing done a bit like that. (Company 6, Shipboard Development - Diversity & Inclusion Manager)

- We made an event last year here in the company with Parks, and people were telling me: 'No, you must not write "LGBT".' And I said: "But, sorry, they deal with that. So, the must come here in the company, they'll talk about all diversity dimensions, but in the poster, I write "Parks, inclusion through LGBT inclusion" etc. etc. Those who know what LGBT means, there's no need to explain them. Who doesn't know about it and is a little bit curious, will look for it and will get it.' (Company 6, Shipboard Development - Diversity & Inclusion Manager)

- When they [the employees] saw that, actually, with Company 6, other companies like, I don't know, Company A the pharmaceutical, or Company B, or Company C belong to Parks, or even others...Company D, Company E, they said: 'Oh, wow, but also them, well,

but then, but then we belong to the good one, the virtuous.' (Company 6, Shipboard Development - Diversity & Inclusion Manager)

● Q: Why did you join Parks?

[...]

R: [...] because I asked the Company, before beginning the process, to compare with association with experience in this context and had the possibility to offer the Company a multi-perspective vision of how other Companies of reference were dealing with the theme. [...] So, the choice to join the association was brought to the top management, there was absolutely no problem, and it was justified as I'm explaining it to you right now: the first need of a comparison with the exterior, with point of reference networks and associations with respect to these themes. (Company 6, Sustainability and External Relations Director)

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**Company 7** ● We are Parks' members since 2013 if I remember well, the year we decided to openly begin a process in this sense, with also the support of an external association that we deemed, in that moment, the best to give us help, confrontation, and so on, on the LGBT theme. (Company 7, Managing Director, Head of Retail Credit Products and Chair of the Diversity Committee).

● Every year, since 2011, we celebrate diversity in Company 7 through what we call 'Diversity Week', that is a week identical all over the world, [...] whereby every country, every business, sets up a series of initiatives about diversity and inclusion, as opportunities of reflection, confrontation and dialogue. [...] Already in 2012, we had the friends of Parks as guests, precisely to begin to discuss about homosexuality, then we joined Parks, if I remember well the first bank to join Parks, and from there we began a process with them. So, we made this first initiative, the we started to talk with colleagues. To begin a process of diversity close to the LGBT world isn't the easiest thing a company can do. (Company 7, Managing Director, Head of Retail Credit Products and Chair of the Diversity Committee).

● Q: [...] there were other actors who intervened? For example, it comes to my mind the equal opportunities commission with the union, did any claims or needs on this theme come from their part?

R: not yet, in this moment. (Company 8, HR Head)

● Q: Were there actors external to the organization that intervened in this reflection of yours on the LGBT theme?

R: Apart from Parks...at this point, once we started we considered it appropriate, also based on the international experience, that worked with the equivalent of Parks abroad, to join also with the Italia division.

Q: Ah, because organizations like Parks already worked with your colleagues out of Italy?

R: Correct. Yes, yes of course, we have a story on LGBT, and so we joined it. Then, by the way, it so happens that I knew Iv. [Parks' founder] when it worked for...

Q: Bank X?

R: Bank Y! Even before, even before... (Company 8, HR Head)

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**Company 8** ● Creating Parks. Because, as with Valore D, we're a founding member. Therefore, it's been interesting because then, indeed, even just saying: 'All right, but don't make a

"foreign legion", because otherwise we don't give a real contribution, I mean, if we always stay among us: Company 8, Company X, Company Y and so on. We end up being a squad of foreign embassies that...' That is. Instead, the real change is to bring best practices that will be read by Italian companies that...that has been Park's breakthrough of last years. (Company 8, External Relations Officer)

- As Parks' founding member, we used Parks to run a check-up of all our internal routines that were in place at the time we joined Parks. Considering the Italian normative from a certain point of view, doing that beyond the integration contract, therefore the things we did were out of the second level of collective bargaining. (Company 8, External Relations Officer)

- Let's say that Parks was a highlighter. It was the element that allowed us to put a yellow highlight under: 'Look that you can do that. You aren't breaking the Law.' Because we have a politically correct parent company: 'We are guests, we have to respect the Law,' and so on and so forth.' And so, Parks told us: 'No, if you go that far, there's no problem actually.' Then, Parks needed a company to use as a 'wedge'. Because we were the first to run a check and then other companies in Parks did. (Company 8, External Relations Officer)

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**Company 9** ● It's obvious that in a Company like ours there's a theme of regulation to be respected. So, the request [for the marriage leave by a same-sex couple] was made. In accordance with the Company regulation but also with the Law it wasn't considered and so the response was negative. After that the situation began to move on. [...] an event that twenty years ago occurred I don't know how often, now was occurring two-three times in a row. Thus, we were facing the fact that, as in the case of the marriage leave, the regulation's response was 'No,' and then we found ourselves to analyse the case with trade unions precisely because it wasn't in Company's intention to create disparities in treatment. (Company 9, Industrial Relations Officer)

- See Par. 4.2 for other quotes.

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**Company 10** ● Now, I'm Parks' Chairman, well, the Chairman, let's say it's an operative office but at the same time an honorary one, because the truth is that most of the real work is done by I. as Executive Director. (Company 10, Founding Partner and Parks' Chairman of the Board)

- [...] although I, who am the founder of this office, am gay, and I had never did coming out, in that moment I said: 'Well, folks, maybe this office isn't so open-minded if even I, who am the founder of this reality, have never felt, say, comfortable enough to say that I'm gay. Hence, this is the proof that this office is not open-minded at all about certain themes.' [...] and from there we realised that actually...the theme was, if you like, on the agenda e so, as a result, we realised that we needed the kind of support such as the one Parks could offer us. (Company 10, Founding Partner and Parks' Chairman of the Board)

- [...] the link with Parks comes from the fact that Iv. [Parks' Founder] made some talks at 'Valore D' [employers' association for gender diversity] and in that occasion met C., who is a partner of mine who is in Valore D and that, mindful of what happened during that Board meeting, few months before by the way, obviously introduced him to me immediately, and so the thing was born there, so, if you like, it's kind of a coincidence. (Company 10, Founding Partner and Parks' Chairman of the Board)

- Indeed, it's not by chance, an interesting situation if you like, that among Parks members the industry that is more represented is that of Law Firms, that is something a little strange, if you like. The reason, obviously, is that perhaps I brought many of them in. (Company 10, Founding Partner and Parks' Chairman of the Board)

**Company 11** ● Parks helped us to really make an external reality check, so to put us in relation with, to compare with other organizations, helped us to network, helped us to take a perspective, how can I say? a little wider and, most of all, to set up training activities, because we ask I. to make a speech about all kind of diversity, and on LGBT diversity, to all our resource manager. So, we used I. to make a speech to all the bosses of the Company 11 Italy organization, and this investment in training is going on because I. will take part in other training sessions scheduled in the next day. We even put fifteen managers, we put them in a classroom for half a day to work with I. right on gender diversity, sorry, sexual orientation diversity. So, I've to say he's helping also in making available to our people very concrete learning and training tools, which can be useful in everyday life. (Company 11, HR Head)

● So for example, without Parks I don't know if we would have been so successful in launching LGBT the way we have as a team, as a diverse team in the organization. because they really, really gave us a helping hand. [...] they also trained our managers, so I leveraged them completely. It's like 'I'm paying you 5.000, what are you gonna do for me?' So, I. made the pitch and I really made the music. So, you know, we would take part in surveys, which also helped us understand like, you know, where we are from a policy or benefit perspective, you know in Company 11 Italy...which allowed us to start saying: 'Hey, we're actually not so bad on some of this stuff. But some other stuff we could be better in'. What I also found interesting is when we did the analysis, that kind of Parks forced us to do, they surveyed index, you found that like the benefits companies are not even ready to acknowledge same-sex, you know...that one boggled my mind...that one made me really sad, I said: "Bah..." ok, so we found some loopholes, you know, to be like partner you know...for the car, or some medical benefits. (Company 11, HR Business Manager)

● Q: [...] and, let's say, couldn't you manage it internally, without resorting to an external actor?

R: I don't think we had the subject matter expertise. And personally, I loved the community. So, from a professional perspective, for me to attend the Parks' meetings, I learned so much, I met new stakeholders in the diversity field, I was able to come back and share best practices that other companies were doing in kind of a forcing function for us to do the same. Just like I think that we made them, and you just feel like you're in a community and together you can do more than alone, you know. Specifically in Italy right? Because I think leader like Parks is helping the movement in the workplace, for sure. (Company 11, HR Business Manager)

● I think the first thing that surprised me was when people whom we said that we were with Parks, some people came out, right? and it's like: "okay, good!" right? it surprised me that it took of Parks' announcement for them to come out. (Company 11, HR Business Manager)

● Companies often don't know even technically, since a normative framework is missing, often, it's not like they say: 'Ok, the Law asks me to do that: I did it, I did not.' [...] in this respect Parks helps a lot, right? Because they have experience, they can tell what you can do and what you can't, and what you must do. (Company 11, Founder employee LGBT Network)

● [...] the fact that Microsoft was a Parks' member made it easier to participate to the Pride, because Parks was participating in Milan and so there wasn't even need for an internal, formal discussion, because we were in Milan with Parks. You know, the Pride in Italy is considered a quite political event, where companies historically don't take part, in contrast to what happens in America and in Nordic Countries where there's a very strong

commercial component. In Italy that's not the case. So, if it hadn't been for Parks, it would have been more difficult for a company to say: 'Ok, I participate.' Because there was in any case the risk to be identified as a company more or less close to a [political] area. But there was Parks and therefore it was very easy. (Company 11, Founder employee LGBT Network)

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**Company 12** • And then the opportunity of Parks came out. We met Iv., who at the time was the president of Parks, I spoke with them and from there we began a process of understanding the most [relevant] issues. [...] Naturally, the confrontation with other companies in Parks helped us a lot. Indeed, at the beginning we were the only Italian company in Parks. There were some multinational companies that were a little bit more advantaged than us because they had some policies imposed by the parent company. And we didn't have these policies. (Company 13, Diversity Director)

• We really believe in inter-company networking. We've believed in from the very first moment. Indeed, we're a founding member of both Valore D and Parks. What do we do with Parks? We did seminars, we did internal culture, what all companies more or less do. That is to say, even though in terms of number sexual orientation is not the, it isn't numerically the first diversity to care about at the moment, right? This is what F. [the HR Director] was talking about before. Nevertheless, even on this theme we are very well positioned. Indeed, we won the Parks' Diversity Award [in 2015], hence we proved to be the most inclusive company for LGBT people in Italy. (Company 13, Diversity Manager)

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**Company 13** • P., who knew very well my family's reality, who knew Company 13, introduced my father to Parks and told him: 'Look, there's an employers' association that works on these themes about the inclusion in the workplace of LGBT people. They mainly work with big [companies]...' Only, because at the time there were only big companies, '...but it could be interesting to begin a process also with small and medium enterprises.' And so, we met, we had lunch here with I., I. presented us the project, what they do, asked us to join them. We fell in love with both I., as a person, because he's beautiful, and S., and with everything they're doing. For us it's a chance to, we aren't a... not to be, let's say, a big company, not to be a big company in numbers but to be a great company in spirit, if you like. (Company 13, Business Development Manager, member of Diversity Board)

• As long as we are members [of Parks], I'm also a bit annoying. In the sense that if I have a doubt, I immediately write to V., write to T. [Diversity Managers of other member companies], I write to whoever I want, saying: 'Look, I was wondering about that thing, what did you do about it?' So, in my opinion, it must be seen as an opportunity by the members. Because if you go, you stop at the board meeting and then you go back home, you risk to not live it fully. The workshops they do are very interesting, I don't miss any of them. (Company 13, Business Development Manager, member of Diversity Board)

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**Company 14** • Q: Why have you joined Parks?  
R: That is a very good question. Provocatively, I tell you that when I was in the HR they asked me to care about this project. I say: 'I don't care. Why the company should care about these matters? I saw them as extremely personal matters and I couldn't see any problem. Then I come back home. I think. I say: 'the fact that for you this is a strictly personal matter, and you are in human resources, and you have to dedicate to other people and not to yourself, does that mean that it is the same for the others as well? I don't know. You have to...since companies do that, probably you have to admit that this thing may be useful for other people.' I reconsidered my position, I came back to my HR Director and told him: 'Look, probably it makes sense that...It interests me, I'm curious.' At the first meeting with Parks, in plenary, not only with the HR Director, my training and development manager and other people from the communication...we're know as a fashion-luxury world, with many self-declaring homosexual people in the company, where, let's say, there's great openness with respect to certain themes. At I. question, because we were trying to understand 'why' Parks, why to begin a certain kind of process,

I. says: 'Are there any homosexuals in the company?' And the all of us: 'Yes, of course.'

We thought....and he says: 'Well, are there any lesbians in the company?'

'Well, no, absolutely no!'

And he says: 'Well, you know that that is statistically impossible?'

And I think that created a little shake-up in our minds, saying: 'Ok, why, I could actually tell X, Y and Z of masculine sex, like, and include them, because openly homosexual, not for gossip or anything else, but I could not mention the name of any lesbian colleague?'

And from there probably, the conviction that all of this was deserving attention by the organization, caught on even more. At least, I would say that it really was a spring for me, that made me, that triggered me. And then because you can't ignore, I mean, it's worth, in my opinion, to find out if everyone perceives as inclusive what the company wants to do.  
(Company 14, Welfare Specialist)

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